NATION

275 cases of rape in custody registered from 2017-22: NCRB

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BUSINESS

Household consumption doubled in last 10 years

>> Page: 7 <<

SPORTS

Ashwin, Jurel, Kuldeep shine as India rise above England

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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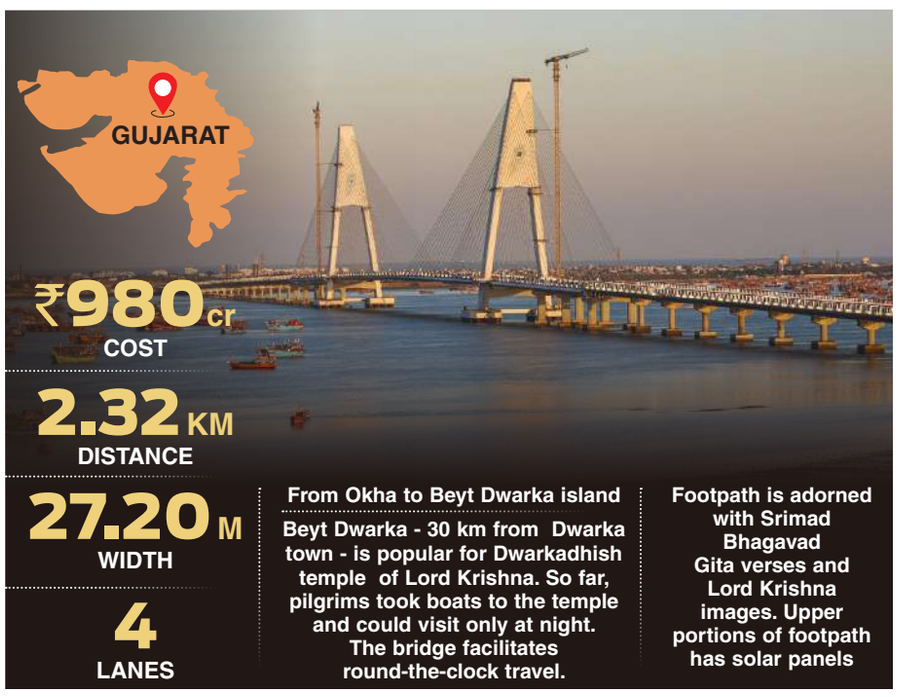
Modi inaugurates India's longest cable-stayed bridge

The bridge has been constructed at a cost of ₹979 crore


GUJARAT
₹980 cr
COST
2.32 KM
DISTANCE
27.20 M
WIDTH
4
LANES
From Okha to Beyt Dwarka island
Beyt Dwarka - 30 km from Dwarka town - is popular for Dwarkadhish temple of Lord Krishna. So far, pilgrims took boats to the temple and could visit only at night. The bridge facilitates round-the-clock travel.
Footpath is adorned with Srimad Bhagavad Gita verses and Lord Krishna images. Upper portions of footpath has solar panels

DEVBHUMI DWARKA, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated 'Sudarshan Setu', the country's longest cable-stayed bridge of 2.32 km, on the Arabian Sea connecting Beyt Dwarka Island to mainland Okha in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district.

Modi began his day by offering prayers at Lord Sri Krishna temple at Beyt Dwarka. He later inaugurated the four-lane cable-stayed bridge called the 'Sudarshan Setu', which boasts a unique design, featuring a footpath adorned with verses from Srimad Bhagavad Gita and images of Lord Krishna on both sides.

- The 2.32 km bridge, including 900 metres of central double span cable-stayed portion and a 2.45 km long approach road, has been constructed at a cost of Rs 979 crore, as per an official release

The 2.32 km bridge, including 900 metres of central double span cable-stayed portion and a 2.45 km long approach road, has been constructed at a cost of Rs 979 crore, as per an official release. The four-lane 27.20 metre wide bridge has 2.50 metre wide footpaths on each side, it said.

The bridge, which was known as 'Signature Bridge', has been renamed as 'Sudarshan Setu' or Sudarshan Bridge. Beyt Dwarka is an island near Okha port, which is nearly 30 km from Dwarka town, where the famous Dwarkadhish temple of Lord Krishna is situated.

At present, devotees visiting the temple at Beyt Dwarka can travel only during the day by boat, while the construction of the bridge will allow them to travel at all times, officials said. *—PTI*

Modi goes scuba diving, performs prayers underwater

DEVBHUMI DWARKA, 25 FEB

The Prime Minister went scuba diving off Panchkui beach coast in Gujarat and performed prayers as he witnessed the ancient Dwarka city, which is underwater. He called it a "divine experience". Narendra Modi prayed while being helped by Navy divers and waved peacock feathers before offering them to Krishna.

No 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast for 3 months in view of polls

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' broadcast will not be aired for the next three months in line with political ethics in view of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. In the 110th episode of the programme, he said there is a possibility that the Model Code of Conduct will be enforced in March. *—PTI*

City to face 24-hr water supply cut

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Water supply will be disrupted in the City for 24 hours from Tuesday 6 am till Wednesday 6 am. According to the press release by Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), it is due to the maintenance work and the installation of Unaccounted For Water (UFW) bulk flow meters. The disruption is expected to affect several neighborhoods across the city, including Nandini Layout, Srinivasa Nagar, Jaimaruthi Nagar, BHEL Layout, Nandini Layout, Srinivasa Nagar, Jaimaruthi Nagar, Sakamma Layout, Narasimha Swamy Layout, Muneshwara Nagar, Jnana Jyothi Nagar, Jnanaganga nagar, Mallathahalli, NGEF Layout, Part of ITI Layout, 1st & 2nd Stage Railway Layout, RHBCS Layout 1st and 2nd stage, Byraweshwaranagar, Sunkadakatte, Jaya Lakshmamma Layout, Kebbehalla, Chandana Layout, Chandrashekar Layout, Narasapura, parts of Dasarahalli zone and RR Nagar Zone, and parts of Bengaluru east.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

This disruption comes amid an acute water shortage in Bengaluru in summer. Weak south-west monsoon rains have led to depleted groundwater levels and declining water levels in the Cauvery River basin reservoirs, which are vital water sources for the City's approximately 14 million residents and its numerous IT companies and startups.

The water scarcity has also led to the increase in prices for water tankers, with residents paying almost double the usual price to meet their daily water needs. In some parts of the City, water tanker dealers are charging as much as 2,000 rupees for a 12,000-litre tanker, compared to 1,200 rupees just a month earlier. *—Salar News*

Fact-finding team detained on way to Sandeshkhali

KOLKATA, 25 FEB

Six members of an independent fact-finding committee led by former chief justice of Patna High Court L Narasimha Reddy were detained by police as they were proceeding to trouble-torn Sandeshkhali area in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district to probe alleged incidents of atrocities on women.

Citing Section 144 CrPC was in force in parts of Sandeshkhali and it would not be prudent to allow them access to the area even in groups of four-five, senior police officers stopped their convoy at the Bhojerhat area.

Reddy, accompanied by former IPS officer Raj Pal Singh, former National Commission for Women member Charu Wali Khanna, advocates OP Vyas and Bhavna Bajaj, and senior journalist Sanjeev Nayak, sat on the wayside vowing to proceed to the area as high drama followed.

Former chief justice of the Patna High Court L Narasimha Reddy with with others coming out from Lalbazar in Kolkata *PHOTO: PTI*

ISF leader arrested

Police arrested ISF leader Ayesha Bibi from Sandeshkhali for her alleged involvement in burning poultry firms of arrested local TMC leader Shibaprasad Hazra. *—PTI*

Anjaria takes oath as CJ of Karnataka HC

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Justice Nilay Vipinchandra Anjaria took oath as the new Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court on Sunday. He was administered oath of office by Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot in a ceremony held at the Raj Bhavan's 'Glass House'.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil were among other dignitaries present at the event. Anjaria was earlier a Judge of the Gujarat High Court, and his name was recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium earlier this month. He assumed charge as the Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court after

Nilay Vipinchandra Anjaria *PHOTO: X/ SIDDARAMAIAH*

Justice PS Dinesh Kumar demitted office on 24 February on attaining the age of 62 years. Justice Anjaria was appointed as a judge of the Gujarat High Court in November 2011 and has been functioning there since then. Before his elevation as a judge, he had practised in the Gujarat High Court in civil, constitutional, company law, labour and service matters, the collegium had noted while recommending his name. *—PTI*

'KASHMIR WILL BE IN INDIA'

Constitution under threat: Farooq in B'luru

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

National Conference President Farooq Abdullah on Sunday asserted that Kashmir is, was and will continue to remain a part of India, while speaking at an event here.

Delivering the valedictory speech at the 'Constitution and National Unity Convention-2024', the Lok Sabha MP from Srinagar raised concerns about the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) ahead of Lok Sabha polls and expressed hope that the Election Commission will ensure that people are given a "true election".

"I bring you all good wishes from my people. Kashmir is a part of India, has been a part of India, and will remain a part of India," Abdullah said.

Farooq Abdullah *PHOTO: PTI*

However, he added that the diversity of the nation needs to be protected for it to become strong.

Claiming that the Constitution is under threat today and that everyone needs to work together to ensure that it remains strong, the former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister said, "If we do not do that, we will regret it in the days to come. Like we regret today this machine (EVMs), that came many many years ago."

> **Many people are trying to erase or change the Constitution. If you don't stand strong and united in the upcoming election and if the Constitution is affected, it is certain that there will be a dictatorship in this country in the days to come**
>
> -Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge also claimed that efforts are underway to change the Constitution, and warned people that there would "certainly be a dictatorship" in India if they don't stand strong and united in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"Many people are trying to erase or change the Constitution. If you don't stand strong and united in the upcoming election and if the Constitution is affected, it is certain that there will be a dictatorship in this country in the days to come.

Whether you want dictatorship or want to lead a life with justice, (deciding that) is important," Kharge said.

If this "obsession" continues, there may be a day when there will be a dictatorship in this country, he said. *—PTI*

Speaker not allowed at conference, deported

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Prof Nitasha Kaul of University of Westminster, who was invited by the State government to speak at the Constitution and National Unity Day, said she was denied entry to India.

Taking to X, attaching the pictures of her document, she said, "Denied entry to India for speaking on democratic and constitutional values. I was invited to a conference as an esteemed delegate by Government of Karnataka (Congress rules state) but Centre refused me entry.

All my documents were valid and current." She was detained at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru. She claimed that immigration gave her no valid reason for

the action and said they were helpless. Kaul claimed that this action comes due to her past remarks against RSS, but this was the first time she was denied an entry. Slamming the government's actions she said, "Banning academics, journalists, activists from India despite having all the valid documents, is pathetic. *—Salar News*

India to add 18 more N-power reactors by 2032: NPCIL

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

India will add 18 more nuclear power reactors with a cumulative capacity to generate 13,800 MWe of electricity, taking the total share of atomic power in the energy mix to 22,480 MWe by 2031-32. This was announced by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated two home-built 700 MW nuclear power reactors at Kakrapar in Gujarat last week. Presently, the NPCIL operates 24 reactors with a total capacity of 8,180 MWe. The Prime Minister dedicated units 3 & 4 of Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS 3 & 4) to the nation on 22 February. *—PTI*

PROBE ORDERED

Freight train runs 70 km without driver

JAMMU/ CHANDIGARH, 25 FEB

A diesel locomotive-hauled freight train travelled more than 70 kilometres from Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua to a village in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district without its drivers on Sunday, officials said.

No casualty or damage to property has been reported, they said and added that an inquiry has been ordered into the incident that took place between 7.25 am and 9 am.

The 53-wagon train loaded with chip stones was on its way to Punjab from Jammu, the officials said.

No casualty or damage to property has been reported` *PHOTO: PTI*

The train had stopped at the Kathua railway station in Jammu for a driver change and it seems that it began to roll down a slope gradient track on the Jammu-Jalandhar section, a spokesperson of the Northern Railway said, citing preliminary information. Both drivers -- loco pilot and assistant loco pilot -- were not on board the freight train, the officials said. The train gained speed along the way, finally coming to a stop on a steep gradient near Unchi Bassi railway station in Punjab, they said.

Divisional Traffic Manager, Jammu, Prateek Srivastava said that "an inquiry has been initiated to know the exact cause of the incident. Prima facie, it seems that the train started rolling down the slope gradient towards Punjab without the driver and his assistant".

He said the train came to a halt near Unchi Bassi due to steep gradient, after covering a distance of more than 70 km.

The officials said that the train was halted with the assistance of sandbags.

Whether the train had been "secured" properly at Kathua on the down gradient is a matter of investigation, the spokesperson said and added that an in-depth probe is underway.

Railway officials and staffers were put on alert along the route.

Government Railway Police (Jalandhar) Sub-Inspector Ashok Kumar said upon receiving information about the runaway train all rail-road crossings on the Jalandhar-Pathankot section were secured. *—PTI*

Farmer's protest: Internet restored in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 25 FEB

Mobile internet services were restored in seven Haryana districts on Sunday, almost two weeks after they were suspended in the wake of farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' agitation.

Officials said no fresh order has been issued to extend the suspension of the mobile services in the seven districts.

According to an earlier order issued by Home Department, the curbs were imposed "to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order in jurisdictions of Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa, including Dabwali, districts in Haryana".

Restoration of mobile internet services after a gap of several days is a big relief," said Kamal, a resident of Ambala. Meanwhile, as the farmers halted their proposed march towards the national capital, Delhi police on Sunday arranged a pathway for the commuters by removing a portion of blocks.

On Sunday, the city police removed two huge cement barriers for those commuters who walk towards Delhi using a small passage at the Singhu and Tikri borders. A commuter Suresh said he commutes to Kundali for work but due to the barriers he has to walk an additional distance of more than a kilometre every day. *—PTI*

HOT WHEELS

Bike racers from various countries take part in CEAT Indian Supercross Bike Racing League at Chikkajala, Airport Road, in Bengaluru, on Sunday. Supercross is a variant of motocross which involves off-road motorcyclists riding on dirt tracks. Compared to motocross, supercross tracks have shorter straights and tighter turns ***PHOTO: SALAR***

9-year old tortured by stepmother, suffers burn injuries

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

A stepmother in the City tortured a nine-year-old daughter by pressing a hot iron box on the girl's feet. The neighbours heard the screams of the girl and called the police. The case has been registered at Anchepalya police station. After the divorce between the deceased, Manvitha's father Srinivasa and her mother Pavithra, Srinivasa married the accused Mamata. The police said Manvitha was living with her grandmother, and Mamata brought her home and abused her. According to the police, Mamata did not like the girl. *—Salar News*

Murder accused released from prison hacked to death

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Vijay Kumar, 27, released from prison six months ago for his involvement in a murder in the year 2017, was brutally killed on Sunday morning in Bengaluru. The assailants attacked him with machetes near his house in Marsur, a village near Anekal, around 4 am. Police suspect Manoj Kumar's brother, Arjun, who lost his brother to Vijay's attack, may have orchestrated the killing. Investigators are analysing CCTV footage and tracing Vijay's activities since his release, looking for clues about the caller who lured him out at such an unusual hour. According to the police, Vijay had kept a low profile after prison, avoiding criminal activities. His past involvement is a likely motive for this murder. *—Salar News*

Officials transferred amid allegations of harassment

KOLAR, 25 FEB

Two revenue personnel, one revenue inspector and another village accountant, were transferred by Kolar Deputy Commissioner Akram Pasha based on alleged harassment by women employees.This comes in the wake of certain allegations of harassment made against them by women employees.The two personnel in question have been transferred to Srinivasapur taluk as allegations of harassment were proved in a preliminary enquiry. The women staff at the Tahsildar office has petitioned to the Tahsildar on 20 February alleging harassment by Revenue Inspector Raghuram Singh. *—Salar News*

Bengaluru police busts prostitution ring

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Bengaluru City police on Sunday raided Luxury Thai Spa at Yelanka New Town and rescued nine women and arrested three individuals under suspicion of running a prostitution racket under the guise of a massage parlour. Accused,Rora, reportedly trafficked women from various countries, including Thailand to Bangalore on tourist and business visas.Byapanahalli police apprehended three indviduals suspected of involvement in a trafficing ring. *—Salar News*

BJP, Cong in dilemma to pick winning horses for LS polls

Cong with its victory in Assembly polls appears to put up a strong show

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

BJP and ruling Congress-the key contenders in the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka -- are grappling with the challenges of finding winning candidates in several constituencies with stakes high for the two national parties.

BJP had swept the 2019 general elections, bagging 25 of the total 28 seats in the state, while an independent backed by the party had also emerged victorious.Congress and JD(S) headed by former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda, which were running a coalition government back then and fought the election together, had come a cropper winning just one seat each.

But the political scene has changed significantly: Congress scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections in May last year and now appears battle-ready, determined to put up a strong show in the Lok Sabha polls.

Both BJP and Congress have their share of challenges, with finding winning horses on top of this list ***PHOTO: PTI***

It is also a role reversal of sorts for JD(S) which joined BJP-led NDA in September last year and wants to prove that it's still a force to reckon with, particularly in South Karnataka.

The coming poll is also seen as a "litmus test" for State BJP President BY Vijayendra, who has the onerous task of leading the party to retain its supremacy in the Lok Sabha elections.

Both BJP and Congress have their share of challenges, with finding winning horses on top of this list.

Congress, which won 135 out of a total 224 seats in the Assembly elections, is keen to field some Ministers but they are shying away, admitted a senior ruling party leader.BJP, banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma, is aiming to win all 28 seats, while a resurgent Congress is targeting to bag 20 by highlighting that it has walked the talk by implementing five guarantee schemes.

- Congress, which won 135 out of a total 224 seats in the Assembly elections, is keen to field some Ministers but they are shying away

Congress' performance in this election is another key test of sorts for Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who has made no secret of his ambition to become Chief Minister, amid speculations of change in guard mid-way of the Assembly term.

According to BJP insiders, the party is having some trouble in seats such as Bidar, Bellary, Haveri, Udupi-Chikmagalur, Dakshina Kannada, Koppal, Davangere, Chamarajanagar, Belgaum and Bijapur, where the party either is facing resistance mostly from within against fielding the sitting LS member, or there is lack of clarity as who the candidate should be.

Chamarajanagar MP V Srinivas Prasad and Haveri MP Shivakumar Udasi have already announced retirement from electoral politics after the current term ends. Ensuring a BJP sweep is also crucial for veteran leader BS Yediyurappa's son Vijayendra to consolidate his position as the party's State President and silence critics who have questioned his selection for the post.

—PTI

YEDIYURAPPA ON LS POLLS

BJP's 1st list of candidates may be out in 3-4 days

C'MAGALURU, 25 FEB

Veteran BJP leader and its Parliamentary Board member BS Yediyurappa on Sunday said that he expects the party to release the first list of candidates for Lok Sabha polls in three or four days.

The former chief minister said the atmosphere was in favour of the BJP across the country and in the state, because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity.

"...we will get to know in three or four days, who is the candidate and if there are any changes...I expect it (first list to be released in three or four days)," Yediyurappa said in response to a question.a

BJP had swept the 2019 general elections, bagging 25 of the total 28 seats in the state, while Sumalatha Ambareesh, an independent backed by the party had also emerged victorious in Mandya.To a question about Sumalatha Ambareesh holding meeting with her supporters amid reports that the BJP may cede the Mandya seat to alliance partner JD(S), Yediyurappa said, "nothing has been discussed, I don't have any information, things will be clear in a couple of days."He said Shobha Karandlaje, who is Union Minister of State for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare in the last Lok Sabha elections had won with a margin of over 3.5 lakh votes from Udupi-Chikmagalur segment and will win with an even bigger margin this time. "There should not be any doubt about it."A postcard campaign has been initiated allegedly by some BJP workers urging Modi and party national President JP Nadda to not field Karandlaje from Udupi-Chikmagalur and give priority to new face. *—PTI*

PM to lay foundation stone for 12 rly stations

MYSURU, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for 12 railway stations in Mysuru on Monday via video conferenceat 12.30 pm on 26 February.

Divisional Railway Manager Shilpi Agarwal announced in a press conference that the event will mark the foundation laying ceremony for 12 overbridges and underbridges in South Western Railway Mysuru Division. This is part of the project to launch 525 railway stations and 1,500 over-bridges and under-bridges.

Rs 367.86 crore has been allocated for all the projects.Agarwal emphasised that modern facilities will be introduced, including improvements to station entrances, toilet facilities, lift and escalator systems, cleanliness measures, and the provision of free Wi-Fi.

Efforts will also focus on promoting local products through initiatives like "one stop one product".Facilities such as ramps for the disabled and non-gravel tracks will be integrated.

Moreover, eight railway underbridges and four road overbridges, constructed at a cost of Rs 63.94 crore, will be inaugurated during the event. Furthermore, the foundation stone laying for a flyover on Bajakere Road between Subrahmanya Road-Yademangala, with an estimated cost of Rs 6.30 crore, will be completed. *—Salar News*

STATIONS & COST IN CRORES

- Hassan (Sakaleshpur): ₹ 28.69
- Dakshina Kannada (Bantwala): ₹ 28.49
- Shivamogga (Talaguppa): ₹ 27.86
- Shivamogga (Sagara Jambagaru): ₹ 26.44
- Dakshina Kannada (Subrahmanya Road): ₹ 26.16
- Tumakuru (Tipaturu): ₹ 25.63
- Ranebennur (Take over): ₹ 25.51
- Chamarajanagar (Chamarajanagar): ₹ 24.58
- Hassan (Hassan): ₹ 24.55
- Shivamogga (Shivamogga Town): ₹ 24.37
- Udupi: ₹ 22.94
- Chitradurga: ₹ 11.78

Cubbon Park activist detained during protest

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

S Umesh Kumar said that detention will not stop the activists from protesting in future ***PHOTO: X***

Cubbon Park Walkers' Association (CPWA) President, S Umesh Kumar, was detained by police, following a protest against the construction of a 10-storey annex in Cubbon Park,on Sunday.The action led to outrage among environmentalists and the public.

Talking to **Salar News**, Kumar said: "This is the work of the government to silence me and have their way with the construction. I am fighting this case on behalf of all the people who love Cubbon Park and who want to save it. The detention will not stop us from protesting in future."

The proposed high-rise annex has been an issue since its proposal, drawing strong opposition from citizens who view the park as a vital green public space. CPWA, along with other environmental groups, have voiced strong objections to the project citing concerns about ecosystem and the rising traffic problems.

Kumar, who has been a part of the CPWA for more than 10 years, said, "This is highly unacceptable what the police and authorities are doing. We are just protesting in a peaceful way to spread the word to all the nature lovers, but it looks like many people from the government do not want us to succeed. But we will not stop until the construction is completely stopped for good." *—Salar News*

Farmers protest resumption of mining near KSR reservoir

MANDYA, 25 FEB

Farmers near Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) dam, which serves as the lifeline of Mandya district, have raised their voices against the recent decision to resume stone mining in the area.

High Court's permission for trial blasting in Bebi Betta, near the reservoir, has sparked apprehension among the farming community. They fear that if the trial blast proves successful, it may pave the way for extensive mining operations, posing a threat to the reservoir.

KRS dam, constructed during the reign of Mysuru kings, is a vital water source. Concerns have been mounting over potential damage to the reservoir caused by extensive stone mining. Efforts were made in the past, notably by MP Sumalatha Ambareesh, to halt mining operations here.

However, despite interventions, miners holding licenses have sought legal recourse to resume activities. Pandava pura Constituency MLA Darshan Puttannaiah emphasised the importance of preserving KRS dam.

Despite interventions, miners holding licenses have sought legal recourse to resume activities ***PHOTO: PTI***

- KRS dam, constructed during the reign of Mysuru kings, is a vital water source

Puttannaiah reiterated his opposition to large-scale blasting, advocating for the closure of crushers near the reservoir and the restriction of mining to manual labour only.

—Salar News

After a day-long search, the four girls were found at Tinthini temple ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Parents fret as minors use free bus travel for trip

RAICHUR, 25 FEB

Government's Shakti Yojana, offering free bus travel for women, has inadvertently sparked concerns regarding its impact on minor girls. In a recent incident in Yaragunti village, Lingasugur taluk of Raichur district, the parents of four 13-year-old minor girls found themselves in a difficult situation.

The incident unfolded when the girls expressed their desire to attend MauneshwarJatra at Tinthini in Yadgir. Despite their parents' refusal to accompany them, the girls used their Aadhaar cards to board a bus bound for the Tinthini annual fair. Unaware of their children's plans, the parents grew anxious when the girls failed to return home. Eventually, a complaint was lodged with Lingasuguru police, prompting a frantic search. Led by District Superintendent of Police, Nikhil B, the police scoured WhatsApp groups and deployed informants to locate the girls.

After a day-long search, the girls were found at Tinthini temple. The police swiftly reunited them with their parents. However, the incident has raised concerns about the potential misuse of the free bus travel scheme by minors.There are growing calls for the Women and Child Welfare Department to address this issue and provide guidance to prevent similar incidents. *—Salar News*

CONGRESS' 4-TIME MLA

Shorapur MLA Raja Venkatappa Naik dies at 67

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Congress MLA from Yadgir district, Shorapurconstituency, Raja Venkatappa Naik died on Sunday following a heart attack. He was 67 and was admitted to Manipal Hospital in Bengaluru. Naik was a four-time MLA. In the 2023 elections, he won by securing 1,13,559 votes against BJP's Raju Gouda. However, he was not given any portfolio in the State cabinet.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed his condolences on X. "Deeply saddened to hear of the demise of MLA from Shorapur and my long time political comrade Raja Venkatappa Naik. I met him three days ago and inquired about his health. The passing away of a philanthropic personality is an irreplaceable loss both personally and politically," Naik was in the hospital for the last four days. To vote in the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, government had given him permission to arrive in ambulance. AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge said, "Raja Venkatappa Naik was a popular leader. He recently took charge as the President of State Warehousing Corporation. He was a cheerful person and had a cordial relationship with everyone. He was also a very good friend of mine. His demise has created a huge void. I hope the family is blessed with enough strength to bear the loss and may his soul rest in peace."

Raja Venkatappa Naik ***PHOTO: X***

Siddaramaiah informed that todays' assembly has been postponed. As the Rajya Sabha polls are on Tuesday, the session has been scheduled to Wednesday, he said.

—Salar News

TN CM gives aide to families hit by floods

TUTICORIN, 25 FEB

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday handed over financial assistance to members of the fishermen community, whose livelihood was worst affected by the heavy rainfall and flooding that occurred in December last year. During the record levels of rainfall that hit Tuticorin, Tirunelveli, Tenkasi, and Kanniyakumari districts, several lives were lost and many were rendered homeless as normal life came to a standstill at the time. Taking cognisance of the severe damage caused by the rainfall and flooding, Stalin had urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December to release Rs 12,659 crore from the funds of National Disaster Response Force towards taking up livelihood and permanent restoration works in the affected districts. In a similar event held in the region, Stalin also distributed loans to members of women's self-help groups of Tuticorin and Tirunelveli. *—PTI*

Kavitha asks CBI to withdraw notice summoning her

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

BRS leader K Kavitha has asked CBI to withdraw the notice issued to her under Section 41-A of CrPC summoning her for questioning in connection with Delhi excise policy scam case. She was asked to appear before the investigation team at CBI headquarters on Monday. In a letter to CBI, the daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao said the notice to appear at the probe agency's headquarters should be put in abeyance in the light of her pressing onerous engagements coupled with the necessity of her presence in the state while the parliamentary elections are underway.A notice under Section 41A of CrPC is issued to a person against whom a "reasonable suspicion" exists.—PTI

Inactive hand grenade found near RSS office

BHIND, 25 FEB

An inactive hand grenade, believed to be 30-35 years old, was found at an empty ground of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) office campus in Madhya Pradesh's Bhind city, on Sunday. The grenade possibly made its way to Sangh office campus from a nearby area where a police firing range was located earlier in Didi village, Superintendent of Police Asit Yadav said. A bomb disposal squad along with sniffer dogs was sent to the spot and found the hand grenade was inactive. The ball-shaped object was found on Friday by some children playing at RSS office ground in Bajaria locality of the city. Sangh office-bearers were away in another city for a meeting and the office was lying vacant. Local BJP MLA Narendra Singh Kushwaha also visited RSS office after getting information. *—PTI*

SC announcing J&K polls matter of shame: Omar

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has said it was "a matter of considerable shame" that Supreme Court had to issue a directive about elections in Jammu and Kashmir rather than Election Commission of India. National Conference leader also said the view that Article 370 was at the root of all problems of Jammu and Kashmir was not correct, and terrorist attacks are now being reported in areas that were earlier free of terrorism, in particular the hills of Jammu, Rajouri, and Poonch. More Kashmiri Pandits have been killed in targeted attacks in the Valley during the tenure of the present government than in the past, he claimed while speaking at ABP Network's `Ideas of India' Summit 3.0 on Saturday. "What are BJP and Government of India going to do about the deadline Supreme Court has set," Abdullah asked. *—PTI*

Post seat pact, Akhilesh joins RaGa's yatra

INDIA 'janbandhan' locked, says Congress

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav take a selfie during 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Agra, on Sunday *PHOTO: X/CONGRESS*

INDIA "janbandhan" is locked and loaded, ready to dispel the "darkness of the anyay kaal", Congress said on Sunday after Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav joined Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Agra.

The coming together of Gandhi and Yadav put days of uncertainty on the latter's participation in the yatra to an end and came as a boost to the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), which has sealed key seat-sharing deals of late. AAP and Congress on Saturday sealed a seat-sharing deal for Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, Gujarat, Goa and Haryana but decided to contest separately in Punjab, considering the "special circumstances" in the state.

With this, Congress finalised its seat adjustments for 125 constituencies with INDIA bloc constituents, after recently striking an arrangement with the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

However, challenges still remain as INDIA bloc has to work out seat-sharing deals in the key states of West Bengal and Maharashtra.

In a post on X, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "Massive, enthusiastic, and energised crowds gathered in Agra to welcome Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi, and Yadav. The leaders garlanded the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar before taking out a historic roadshow through the heart of Agra."

"INDIA janbandhan is locked and loaded, ready to dispel the darkness of the anyay kaal," Ramesh said. Congress and Samajwadi Party workers raised slogans in support of Yadav and Gandhi as the two leaders, accompanied by Priyanka, waved at the crowd gathered for the yatra.Attacking the government in his address on the occasion, Yadav said, "Today, farmers are standing against the government. The government is scared of the power of farmers. In the coming time, BJP will be removed and INDIA coalition government will give respect to farmers." *—PTI*

FLIP AHEAD OF POLLS

Rithesh Pandey quits BSP, joins BJP

LUCKNOW, 25 FEB

Lok Sabha MP Ritesh Pandey receives BJP membership slip from UP Dy CM Brajesh Pandey as he joins BJP *PHOTO: PTI*

Ahead of the upcoming general elections, BSP Lok Sabha MP from Ambedkar Nagar Ritesh Pandey on Sunday resigned from the party's primary membership and joined BJP in New Delhi.

In his resignation letter addressed to BSP president Mayawati, Pandey said he has concluded that the party does not need his service as neither has he been called for meetings for a long time nor has the party leadership spoken to him.

"I do not have any other option apart from resigning from the primary membership of the party. The decision to break the relationship with the party is a difficult decision from the emotional point of view," he added in his letter.

Hours later, he joined BJP in the presence of senior party leaders, including Uttar Pradesh in-charge Baijayant Jay Panda, national general secretary Tarun Chugh, Uttar Pradesh unit chief Bhupendra Singh, Rajya MP and party's national media in-charge Anil Baluni.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak was also among those present.

Welcoming Pandey into the party fold, Baluni said, impressed by BJP's policies and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, a large number of political and social workers want to join the party. vPathak said Pandey has taken a "courageous step" by joining BJP."His father Rakesh Pandey, who is a member of Uttar Pradesh Assembly, was Lok Sabha MP from Ambedkar Nagar in the past. While working with him and participating in social activities, Ritesh Pandey became popular and was elected to the Lok Sabha from Ambedkar Nagar," he added.

Speaking at the press conference, Pandey thanked BJP leadership for giving him the party's primary membership with "a lot of love and respect".

"I want to thank respected Nadda Ji for giving me a place in this family. I would also like to thank the home minister of the country who guided me throughout this journey," he said.

Pandey said he will work with "full dedication" under BJP leadership and help the party achieve its target of winning 400-plus seats in Lok Sabha polls.

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh said he is confident that Pandey will carry forward Modi's vision for a 'Viksit Bharat'. *—PTI*

Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker were killed when unidentified men sprayed bullets on their SUV *PHOTO: X/SCREENGRAB*

INLD's Haryana unit President shot dead

CHANDIGARH, 25 FEB

- The attack, which came weeks before Lok Sabha elections, drew sharp reactions from Opposition parties, which alleged a breakdown in law and order in BJP-ruled state

Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker were killed when unidentified assailants sprayed bullets on their SUV in Bahadurgarh near Delhi on Sunday. Three private gunmen hired by Rathee for security also suffered injuries in the attack.

The attack, which came weeks before Lok Sabha elections, drew sharp reactions from Opposition parties, which alleged a breakdown in law and order in BJP-ruled state. Rathee, 70, a former MLA from Bahadurgarh was traveling in an SUV when the assailants, who were in a car, attacked him in the town of Jhajjar district.Confirming the attack on Rathee, police said further investigation into the matter was underway. INLD leader Abhay Chautala accused the government of failing to provide Rathee with security despite there being a threat to his life and demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Home Minister Anil Vij. "The two-time MLA, who is our state unit chief, was not provided with security. In writing, representations had been made to senior police officers and state home minister that he was facing threats and should be provided with security," he said. He also said that law and order has broken down in Haryana and today that has been proved yet again. Opposition Congress and Aam Aadmi Party also hit out at Manohar Lal Khattar government over the incident. Senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda said, "The news of INLD state president Nafe Singh Rathee being shot dead in Haryana is very sad. *—PTI*

BJP's Amarinder slams cops over violence against injured farmer

CHANDIGARH, 25 FEB

Senior BJP leader Amarinder Singh on Sunday condemned Haryana Police for the "barbaric act of violence" against a farmer who was injured during the ongoing farm protest at Khanauri border.

He also urged Haryana Chief Minister ML Khattar to take strict action against the erring policemen.

Farmer leaders too hit out at the Haryana Police over the injuries suffered by the farmer Pritpal Singh, who is currently undergoing treatment at PGIMER in Chandigarh.

Farmer leader Baldev Singh Sirsa said Pritpal Singh was doing "langar seva" at Khanauri on Punjab-Haryana border when he was allegedly dragged by Haryana policemen.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Sunday said Pritpal Singh has suffered multiple injuries.

Pandher further said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should come forward and accept the demands of the protesting farmers so that the deadlock in talks between the Centre and farmer leaders is broken.

—PTI

Fadnavis is trying to kill me: Manoj Jarange

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Sunday said he would march to Mumbai and protest outside the residence of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis who he accused of trying to kill him.

The announcement, made at the end of a speech of more than one hour in Antarwali Sarati in Jalna in which Jarange made several allegations against Fadnavis, took his supporters by surprise.

The announcement led to chaos at the site, where the activist's supporters had gathered in large numbers.

He said allegations against him were leveled once the Maratha quota bill was passed in the Maharashtra legislature on 20 February.He also spoke about "Brahminical tricks" of Fadnavis even while asserting that his allegations were not against "all Brahmins".

"Fadnavis does not like anyone to be more popular than him. It is because of Fadnavis that police complaints were filed against Maratha activists despite their peaceful protests. The court has allowed us to protest peacefully. Then why were police complaints filed," he said."I am not backing down from my demand to include Marathas in OBC segment" he added. *—PTI*

IN RAJKOT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a public meeting in Rajkot, on Sunday. Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel are also seen. *PHOTO: PTI*

'Hindu pride up but no Modi magic'

PATNA, 25 FEB

Senior BJP leader Subramanian Swamy on Sunday claimed "a surge in Hindu pride" was likely to boost the party's prospects in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, but discounted the role of "Modi magic".

The maverick leader, who was here to take part in a 'law conclave', asserted that in BJP, and its ideological parent RSS, greater value was attached to 'sangathan' (organisation) and 'siddhant' (principles) than to individuals.I too believe that BJP will surpass its previous electoral performances because, for the first time, Hindus are feeling proud of their identity. They no longer feel the diffidence that was thrust upon them during Nehru's time," Swamy said, responding to queries about Modi's claim of the party winning more than 370 seats and NDA crossing the 400-mark. Swamy also welcomed the return to NDA of Nitish Kumar. *—PTI*

CHIDAMBARAM SLAMS BJP OVER POLICE EXAM

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Sunday slammed BJP after the recent police constable recruitment examination in Uttar Pradesh was canceled, saying this is robbing the poor and leaving them unemployed for a long time.

Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday canceled the police constable recruitment examination following allegations of a question paper leak and ordered a re-test within six months.

The state government also announced a probe into the allegations by Special Task Force (STF).

In a post on X, Chidambaram said, "Over 43 lakh candidates wrote the examination for selection to 60,400 posts of police constables in Uttar Pradesh."They traveled long distances in crowded buses and trains, spent money, and braved many difficulties. Is this good governance? This is robbing the poor of their hard-earned little money and leaving them poorer and unemployed for a long time," he added.The fact that over 43 lakh youths are unemployed and competed for 60,400 posts tells the story of Uttar Pradesh ruled by BJP, Chidambaram said. *—PTI*

PM IN PADAYATRA MODE

Modi's back-to-back Kerala visits spark political fervour

T'PURAM, 25 FEB

Ahead of Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is making his third visit to Kerala in less than two months with the aim of fulfilling his dream of ending the electoral drought for BJP in the southern state.

Almost a year ago, Modi unveiled his party's aspiration to secure power in Kerala. The announcement, made on 2 March 2023, came following BJP's notable performance in elections within the Christian-majority states of Nagaland and Meghalaya, boosting confidence within the party.

According to sources, Modi is scheduled to arrive in the capital city on Tuesday for an official programme, where he will also participate in the concluding ceremony of the 'padayatra' organised by the BJP's state unit.

State spokesperson of BJP, Sandeep Vachasapathi, expressed confidence in the party's prospects, citing increased focus from the central leadership and growing acceptance of Modi among Keralites.

Vachasapathi claimed that Modi's appeal is transcending religious and sectarian lines.

He dismissed concerns about past electoral setbacks, banking on Modi's charisma to overcome obstacles and secure electoral success for BJP in Kerala.He expressed confidence in Modi's appeal, claiming that minorities in Kerala, a significant portion of the population, will support him due to his universal acceptance and non-sectarian image.

However, the Congress and the CPI(M) remain steadfast in their anti-BJP stance.However, Congress and CPI(M) remain steadfast in their anti-BJP stance.Senior CPI(M) leader MA Baby accused the BJP of employing a strategy of persuasion and coercion to attract parties outside the NDA fold and said this would not work in Kerala.According to Baby, any significant breakthrough for the BJP in Kerala would require cooperation from the Congress and the UDF, which he doubted would occur due to the risk of damaging their credibility. Senior Congress leader Kodikkunnil Suresh reiterated the state's resistance to the BJP, citing concerns among minorities about their safety under BJP rule.Suresh expressed confidence that the BJP would struggle to secure minority votes, a crucial factor for success in Kerala.

Modi held two large roadshows in Kerala. *—PTI*

Almost a year ago, Prime Minister Modi unveiled his party's aspiration to secure power in Kerala *PHOTO: PTI*

PM to open Sikkim's first railway station

GANGTOK, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone for Sikkim's first railway station, Rangpo Station, on 26 February, said Deputy Railway Manager (DRM) of Alipurduar.

Prime Minister Modi will lay the foundation for almost 550 Amrit railway stations on 26 February.

— *ANI*

Modi to visit Bihar on 2 March

PATNA, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Bihar on 2 March to launch several projects and address public meetings, state BJP president Samrat Choudhary said on Sunday. Choudhary, spoke to journalists at the party's state headquarters. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Haldwani violence: Malik gets 10-day police custody

NAINITAL, 25 FEB

Abdul Malik, the prime suspect in Haldwani violence, was presented before the Sessions Court in Haldwani. Nainital police, who apprehended Malik in Delhi, appealed to the court for custody, arguing that a 10-day interrogation period was essential. Accepting police's request, the court has placed Abdul Malik in police custody until 6 March. On Saturday, Uttarakhand police arrested the key accused in the violence that took place in Banbhulpura, Haldwani, on 8 February. State Director General of Police Abhinav Kumar had announced a cash reward of Rs 50,000 for Uttarakhand Police team that arrested Abdul Malik from Delhi, spokesperson IG Nilesh Bharne said. *—PTI*

Four killed in blast at firecracker factory in UP

KAUSHAMBI, 25 FEB

At least four people died in an explosion at a firecracker factory in Uttar Pradesh's Kaushambi district on Sunday. The blast took place around noon in Maheva village in the Kokhraj police station area and was heard several kilometers from the factory. Soon after information was received about the explosion, fire brigades and ambulances rushed to the spot. "Four people died in the explosion, the cause of which is yet to be ascertained," said. Superintendent of Police (SP) Brijesh Kumar Srivastava. The fire at the factory has been brought under control to a great extent. Efforts are being made to identify the deceased, police said. *—PTI*

R'than teacher held for thrashing 5-yr-old, arrested

KOTA, 25 FEB

A government school-teacher has been arrested in Rajasthan's Kota district for allegedly thrashing a five-year-old girl and dislocating her arm bone, police said on Sunday. Mohammed Sattar was arrested on Saturday evening on a complaint from the father of the girl, a Class 1 student of the Khedarasulpur government senior secondary school, they said.The case has been registered at the Kaithun police station of the district. The accused teacher will be produced before a court on Sunday, Circle Officer (Kota Rural) Gagendra Singh said.The girl's father has alleged that Sattar thrashed his daughter in school on Saturday, the officer said. The teacher has been booked under the Indian Penal Code and SC/ST Act, Circle Inspector, Kaithun police station, Harlal Meena said. Sattar allegedly thrashed the girl and pulled her arm that caused dislocation of the bone, he said. Sattar allegedly thrashed the girl and pulled her arm that caused dislocation of the bone, and the matter is being probe, he said.*—PTI*

Ch'garh: 3 Naxalites die in encounter with security forces

KANKER, 25 FEB

Three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Sunday morning, a senior police official said. The face-off took place in a forest in Koyalibeda area when a joint team of the District Reserve Guard and the Border Security Force was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Kanker Superintendent of Police Indira Kalyan Elesela said. So far, bodies of three Naxalites and two weapons have been recovered from the encounter site and the operation is still underway, the official said.*—PTI*

275 cases of rape in custody registered from 2017-22: NCRB

Data shows a gradual decrease in such cases over the years

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

More than 270 cases of rape in custody were registered from 2017 till 2022, according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, with women rights activists attributing such instances to lack of sensitisation and accountability within law enforcement systems.

The offenders include police personnel, public servants, members of the armed forces and staff of jails, remand homes, places of custody and hospitals, according to the data of the NCRB.

The data highlights that there has been a gradual decrease in such cases over the years. In 2022, 24 cases were registered, down from 26 in 2021, 29 in 2020, 47 in 2019, 60 in 2018 and 89 in 2017.

Of the 275 cases of custodial rape registered since 2017, Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest number of cases at 92, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 43 cases.

"Custodial settings provide unique opportunities for abuse, with state agents often using their power to force or coerce sexual access," Population Foundation of India, executive director, Poonam Muttreja said.

"There are instances where women taken into custody for their protection or due to their vulnerable status, such as victims of trafficking or domestic violence, are subjected to sexual violence, reflecting a misuse of power under the guise of state protection," she said.

She stressed on the urgent need for victim-centric approach, strengthened legal frameworks, and institutional reforms to address the root causes and consequences of custodial rape effectively. "The reported cases of custodial rape are often a manifestation of power imbalances and a lack of accountability within our law enforcement systems," Muttreja said.

She said such rape causes include patriarchal social norms, abuse of power by authorities, lack of gender-sensitivity training for police and societal stigma attached to victims.

Of the 275 cases of custodial rape registered since 2017, Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest number
PHOTO: PIXABAY

"These elements contribute to an environment where such heinous crimes can occur and, in many cases, go unreported or unaddressed," she said.

Muttreja said that to address the root causes and consequences of custodial rape effectively, the government must take a multi-faceted approach.

"This should include legal reform, better training for law enforcement, social and behaviour change communication to change social norms and stronger mechanisms for accountability.

Additionally, fostering partnerships with NGOs, civil society and community groups can help in creating a more inclusive and informed response to this grave situation," she said.

Reflecting on her experiences as a Nguvu Change Leader from women's leadership organisation Nguvu collective undertaking rescue operations, Pallabi Ghosh shared troubling accounts of survivors alleging rape by police officers. *—PTI*

The fifth edition of joint military between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force began at Mahajan Field in Rajasthan on Sunday
PHOTO: X

India, Japan start military exercise

JAIPUR, 25 FEB

The fifth edition of joint militatry Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force began at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan on Sunday.

The military exercise, aimed at fostering military cooperation and enhancing combined capabilities to execute joint operations in a semi-urban environment, is scheduled to be conducted from 25 February to 9 March .Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' is an annual exercise and conducted alternatively in India and Japan. The contingent on both sides consists of 40 personnel each. The Japanese contingent is being represented by troops from the 34th Infantry Regiment, while the battalion from the Rajputana Rifles will represent the Indian Army contingent.In a press release, the Ministry of Defence stated, "The aim of the exercise is to foster military cooperation and enhance combined capabilities to execute joint operations in a semi-urban environment under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter. The exercise would focus on a high degree of physical fitness, joint planning, joint tactical drills, and the basics of special arms skills." *—ANI*

Huge cache of arms, ammunition recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, 25 FEB

Manipur Police have recovered a huge cache of arms and explosives during search operations at two villages in Churachandpur district.

Security forces seized four firearms, one improvised long-range heavy mortar, and ammunition on Saturday from the outskirts of D Haolenjang village.

Fake currency notes with a total face value of Rs 1,200 were also seized from there.

During another search operation, a police team recovered 10 guns, eight gelatine sticks, and ammunition from Moljang village in Churachandpur, the statement issued by the police control room said.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

In a separate operation, three people were arrested from Keisampat junction in Imphal West district after two SLR rifles were seized from their possession, an officer said.

A case has been registered against them, and the investigation is underway, he said. *—PTI*

ED summons Hiranandani Group

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned Niranjan Hiranandani and his son Darshan Hiranandani, the promoters of prominent Mumbai-based real estate developer Hiranandani Group, for questioning in a foreign exchange violation case on 26 Feb.

Hiranandani's have been asked to depose at the central agency's office in Mumbai but they may choose to submit their primary responses through an authorised representative.

About four premises of Hiranandani Group in and around Mumbai were searched by ED last week under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act.Apart from some foreign transactions, the agency is said to be probing the beneficiaries of a British Virgin Islands (BVI)-based trust allegedly linked to Hiranandani Group promoters.The group has said it will cooperate with the ED in this Foreign Exchange Management Act(FEMA)investigation. Official sources said ED probe is not linked to another FEMA investigation conducted against Mahua Moitra, *—PTI*

HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

Data shows decline in fatalities in Kerala

T'PURAM, 25 FEB

Amid escalating protests against wild animal attacks threatening lives and property in Kerala, particularly in the hill district of Wayanad, recent data from State Forest Department shows that human fatalities resulting from such encounters have notably declined over the past three years.

According to Forest Department data, the number of fatalities due to elephant attacks in Kerala during the period 2023-2024 decreased compared to numbers recorded in 2021-2022.

In Kerala, 17 people lost their lives in elephant attacks during 2023-2024. This is a decrease from the 27 deaths reported in 2022-2023 and 35 in 2021-2022, it says.

These numbers, when compared to states like Odisha, Jharkhand, and Karnataka, which are infamous for human-animal conflict, are much lesser. According to Forest sources in Jharkhand, over 100 people are killed annually in elephant attacks on average.

Karnataka Forest Department reported 148 human fatalities due to human-elephant conflict in the last five years.

Kerala Forest Department shows that over the past five years, fatalities from wild boar attacks have shown a significant increase in the state. In 2016-2017, only four human casualties were reported in wild boar attacks, but by 2023-2024, this number had risen to 11, revealed the data. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

- In 2016-2017, only four human casualties were reported in wild boar attacks, but by 2023-2024, this number had risen

India, others crackdown traffickers

New Delhi,25 Feb

India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia have planned coordinated crackdowns on wildlife trafficking kingpins operating through their jurisdiction by sharing criminal intelligence and breaking down their financial flows, officials said. During the Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Meeting on Exotic Species, experts deliberated on crucial routes used by the traffickers to transport exotic species. *—PTI*

Ch'garh Tiger Reserve sees no human fatality

RAIPUR, 25 FEB

- The last casualty in the elephant attack was reported on 22 February 2023 in the tiger reserve

There has been no loss of human life in wild animal attacks at Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh in the last year as a result of measures undertaken to reduce man-animal conflict.

During the same period, the anti-poaching team of the reserve arrested 120 poachers, and encroachments on 650 hectares inside the reserve were removed.

The last casualty in the elephant attack was reported on 22 February 2023 in the tiger reserve.

The app, named 'Chhattisgarh Elephant Tracking and Alert', was developed jointly by the Forest Management Information System (FMIS) and the state forest department's wildlife wing.

The app uses inputs provided by 'Hathi Mitra Dal' (local volunteers) members who keep a tab on the movement of jumbos in forest areas to send alert calls and messages about their location.

Awareness programmes held in the villages affected by elephant attacks have also helped in making people aware of the human-animal conflict and conservation. In the last two years, no elephant death has been reported in the reserve, the official said.

The control over poaching and encroachments also resulted in enhancing the number of herbivores like deer, barking deer, nilgai, sambar, and Indian bison, which can be assessed by their pictures captured in trap cameras. *—PTI*

Filmmaker Kumar Shahani dies at 83

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Filmmaker Kumar Shahani, a significant name in the Indian parallel cinema who directed films such as "Maya Darpan", "Char Adhyay" and "Kasba", has died at the age of 83. 123sonography #1 Online Course Provider ÖFFNEN The director passed away last night at a hopsital in Kolkata, close friend, actor Mita Vashisht said.

PHOTO: X

"He passed away around 11pm last night due to age related health issues at a hospital in Kolkata. *—PTI*

Kasganj: 10 of family among 24 killed

LUCKNOW, 25 FEB

When the ill-fated tractor-trolley fell into a pond, 23 people, including eight children, were killed, in Kasganj on Saturday.

One-and-a-half-year-old boy Siddu and his family, residing in Nagla Kasa village of Etah district in Uttar Pradesh, were going to Kasganj to take a dip in river Ganga and to also perform his 'mundan'.Out of 23 people, 10 belonged to Siddu's family.

Uttar Pradesh Sugarcane Minister Laxmi Narayan Chaudhary, who visited Nagla Kasa village, spoke to the villagers and expressed deep shock over the loss of lives in the tragic incident.

"There was a 'mundan' ceremony of a child and his family was going to Kasganj in a tractor, which belonged to someone else. As the tractor moved towards Kasganj, other people also started getting into the tractor trolley. In Kasganj district, there is a pond on the roadside which is around 3-4 feet deep. The driver's hand apparently slipped there which led to the tractor getting overturned and subsequently loss of so many lives," Chaudhary said.

Girish Chandra, the pradhan of Nagla Kasa village, told PTI, "Most of the deceased were from Nagla Kasa and some from nearby villages. I have not spoken to the driver, who has survived. Yesterday, I had gone to Patiyali, and the atmosphere there was very saddening." *—PTI*

'WOMEN'S SABARIMALA'

Thousands offer pongala at Attukal Devi temple

T'PURAM, 25 FEB

Under the slightly cool relief of a cloudy sky, tens of thousands of women gathered in the Kerala capital on Sunday to partake in a sacred ritual known as 'Pongala.'

This ritual, considered one of the largest religious gatherings of women in the world, saw makeshift brick stoves line the roads for several kilometers in the city as women prepared offerings to honour the presiding deity of the famous Attukal Bhagavathy temple. The ritual had made it to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2009 for being the largest religious gathering of women on a single day when 2.5 million took part in it.Rituals began shortly after, at 10.40am, when the chief priest lit the main hearth (Pandara Aduppu) near the shrine, signaling the start of the annual event.Women from all across the state and outside prepared 'pongala', a mix of rice, jaggery, and scraped coconut, in fresh earthen pots by lining up on either side of the roads for kilometers around the shrine in the state capital.

This ritual is considered one of the largest religious gatherings of women in the world
PHOTO: PTI

Women have been arriving in the state capital since Thursday to grab good spots for setting up their brick hearths where they will prepare 'pongala'. Preparing 'pongala' is considered an auspicious all-women ritual as part of the annual festival of the Attukal temple here, popularly known as the 'Women's Sabarimala'.

As per a local legend, the annual festival commemorates the hospitality accorded by women in the locality to Kannagi, the divine incarnation of the protagonist of the Tamil epic 'Silappadhikaram' while she was on her way to avenge the injustice meted out to her husband Kovalan, after destroying Madurai city.

This year's 'pongala' is in the news for another reason also -- churches here have changed their worship timings on Sunday to accommodate the huge number of devotees expected to turn up on the day to celebrate the festival. Besides changing the worship timings, some churches will also open their grounds and some portions of their buildings for those celebrating the 'pongala'.In order to ensure that festival is celebrated in a safe and clean manner, the Kerala government's Suchitwa Mission has issued a set of protocols. *—PTI*

HC orders 'arrest' of foreign ship over payment

CUTTACK, 25 FEB

Orissa High Court has ordered the 'arrest' of a foreign cargo ship in connection with unpaid berth hire charges at the Paradip Port in the state.

Under admiralty law, a ship can be arrested for the enforcement of maritime claims that arise out of the ownership, construction, possession, management, operation, or trading of any ship.

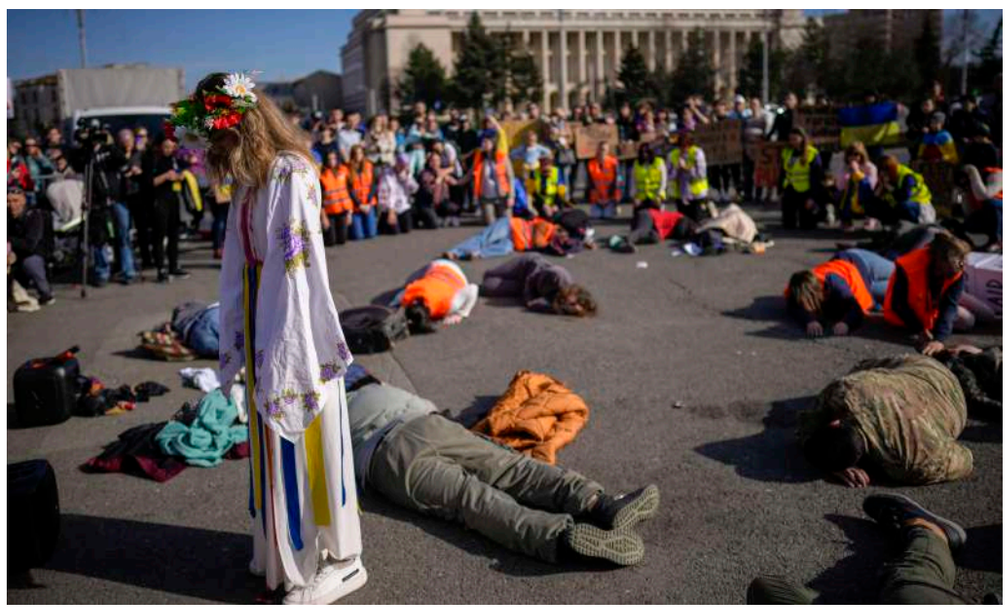
Panama-registered ship, MV Debi, has been anchored at the port for nearly three months in connection with another case.

Several packets believed to be filled with cocaine valued at over Rs 220 crore were seized from it on 1 December 2023. Paradip International Cargo Terminal Pvt Ltd (PICTPL), a concessionaire of the Paradip Port, has filed a claim suit against the ship and approached the high court last month seeking a decree to arrest the ship.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

PICTPL has made a maritime claim of Rs 7.95 crore on the cargo ship, which includes berth hire charges, penal charges, legal costs, and others.The single judge bench of Justice V Narasingh observed that PICTPL has been prima facie able to establish that the suit will be infructuous unless the cargo ship is arrested. *—PTI*

2 YEARS OF INVASION



Ukrainians take part in a skit portraying the life of Ukrainian civilians during war, outside the Victoria Palace, the Romanian government headquarters in Bucharest, Romania. Members of the Ukrainian community staged a march in the Romanian capital to mark the two year anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine
PHOTO: PTI

How India pulled off the 'electoral experiment'

1951-52 ELECTIONS

An archival photograph of 1952 showing a voter at a polling station made for the first general elections of India, displayed at a poll museum, in New Delhi
PHOTO: PTI

Anascent Indian republic that still carried the scars of the country's Partition and whose vast majority of voters were then illiterate executed an unprecedented democratic exercise in 1951-52, surmounting a host of challenges while proving naysayers wrong.

With 173 million electors and 1,874 candidates, country's first-ever parliamentary election after independence for 489 seats in the House of the People (Lok Sabha) was conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI), then barely an year old.

ECI, now gearing up for the 18th general elections to the Lok Sabha in 2024, had a mammoth task at hand in the 1950s, while navigating through demographic, geographic and logistical challenges.

Former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi said the first general election of 1951-52 was then also the "largest democratic exercise conducted in the world".

"Hats off to Sukumar Sen (the first chief election commissioner of India) who did it from scratch and did a good job. The exercise of such a scale was conducted without any prior experience, without any earlier infrastructure," he said.

And, indeed India pulled off the "great experiment" as it was dubbed back then in a short video produced on the election by the Films Division, which also mentions that mock polls were held prior to the actual exercise.

According to the "General Elections 2019: An Atlas", published by the ECI, the first election began on 25 October, 1951, and was spread over four months, with polling held on 17 days.

But during the preparations of the electoral rolls before beginning the exercise, the commission noticed that a large number of women voters had been enrolled in some states "not by their own names" but by the description of the relationship they bore to their male family members (e.g. A's mother, B's wife).

According to local customs, women in these areas were averse to disclosing their proper names to strangers. Instructions were thus issued that the name of an elector being an essential part of his or her identity, must be included in the electoral rolls, according to an official report on the first general elections published in 1955.

Public awareness was raised and special extension was given to have the actual name of such electors added.

"Out of a total of nearly 80 million women voters in the country, nearly two-to-eight million eventually failed to disclose their proper names, and the entries relating to them had to be deleted from the rolls. Practically, all such cases were from the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Rajasthan and Vindhya Pradesh," read the report.

Painting of ballot boxes with different colours or assigning a separate ballot box for each candidate and to place a different mark each on such boxes had been tried in the past, but the commission decided in favour of the "symbol system" to tide over the constraint of low literacy rate and avoid confusion.

"The percentage of literacy in India being in the neighbourhood of 16.6 only, it would have been impossible for the vast majority of the voters who are illiterate to mark their votes on ballot papers with the names of the contesting candidates printed on them," read the 1955 report.

The commission had also decided that the symbols should be familiar and easily recognisable by votersand that no object having any religious or sentimental associations such as a cow, a temple, the national flag, a spinning wheel should find a place in the list of approved symbols.

Unlike today's ubiquitous "open hand" symbol of the Congress, in the maiden elections -- which the party had won -- it was allotted a symbol depicting "two bullocks with yoke on".

A total of 1,32,560 polling stations, with 1,96,084 polling booths, were set up throughout the country. Polling began from Himachal Pradesh before the snowfall season. The 1951-52 elections were held under the "first-past-the-post system".

The ECI undertaking this nationwide exercise also faced challenges of difficult terrains such as in Rajasthan that had vast desert areas with no roads and lacked communication facilities.

Former CEC Quraishi, also the author of "An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election", said there were many, mostly western critics, who thought that the first election was a "bad experiment".

The cut-off age then to become a voter was 21 years.

The seminal report also states, "Never before has such a vast electorate gone to the polls. The future of the democratic way of life in India depended very largely on the success of the experiment as also on the extent to which these elections could evoke public enthusiasm and satisfaction."

—PTI

SALAR ساڈ

US Moon landing marks new phase of lunar science

For the first time since 1972, NASA landed a craft on the surface of the Moon in February 2024. But the agency didn't do it alone – instead, it partnered with commercial companies. Thanks to new technologies and public-private partnerships, the scientific projects brought to the Moon on this craft and on future missions like it will open up new realms of scientific possibility.

As parts of several projects launching this year, teams of scientists, including myself, will conduct radio astronomy from the south pole and the far side of the Moon.

NASA's commercial lunar payload services program, or CLPS, will use uncrewed landers to conduct NASA's first science experiments from the Moon in over 50 years. The CLPS program differs from past space programs. Rather than NASA building the landers and operating the program, commercial companies will do so in a public-private partnership. NASA identified about a dozen companies to serve as vendors for landers that will go to the Moon. NASA buys space on these landers for science payloads to fly to the Moon, and the companies design, build and insure the landers, as well as contract with rocket companies for the launches. Unlike in the past, NASA is one of the customers and not the sole driver.

The first two CLPS payloads are scheduled to launch during the first two months of 2024. There's the Astrobotics payload, which launched on 8 January before its lander, named Peregrine, experienced a fuel issue that cut its journey to the Moon short.

Next, there's the Intuitive Machines payload. Intuitive Machines' lander, named Odysseus, landed near the south pole of the Moon on Thursday. NASA has also planned a few additional landings – about two or three per year – for each of the next few years.

NASA's ROLSES program, otherwise known as Radiowave Observations at the Lunar Surface of the photoElectron Sheath was built by the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and is led by Natchimuthuk Gopalswamy.

The ROLSES instrument landed on the Moon as one of six NASA payloads on the Intuitive Machines lander in February. Between ROLSES and another mission scheduled for the lunar far side in two years, LuSEE-Night, our teams will land NASA's first two radio telescopes on the Moon by 2026.

For our first mission with ROLSES, which launched in February 2024, we will collect data about environmental conditions on the Moon near its south pole. On the Moon's surface, solar wind directly strikes the lunar surface and creates a charged gas, called a plasma. Electrons lift off the negatively charged surface to form a highly ionized gas.

This doesn't happen on Earth because the magnetic field deflects the solar wind. But there's no global magnetic field on the Moon. With a low frequency radio telescope like ROLSES, we'll be able to measure that plasma for the first time, which could help scientists figure out how to keep astronauts safe on the Moon. The team is also planning to examine the Earth from the surface of the Moon and use that process as a template for looking at radio emissions from exoplanets that may harbor life in other star systems.

Magnetic fields are important for life because they shield the planet's surface from the solar/stellar wind.

In the future, the team hopes to use specialized arrays of antennas on the far side of the Moon to observe nearby stellar systems that are known to have exoplanets. If we detect the same kind of radio emissions that come from Earth, this will tell us that the planet has a magnetic field. And we can measure the strength of the magnetic field to figure out whether it's strong enough to shield life.

The Lunar Surface Electromagnetic Experiment at Night, or LuSEE-Night, will fly in early 2026 to the far side of the Moon. LuSEE-Night marks scientists' first attempt to do cosmology on the Moon.

LuSEE-Night is a novel collaboration between NASA and the Department of Energy. Data will be sent back to Earth using a communications satellite in lunar orbit, Lunar Pathfinder, which is funded by the European Space Agency.

Since the far side of the Moon is uniquely radio quiet, it's the best place to do cosmological observations. During the two weeks of lunar night that happen every 14 days, there's no emission coming from the Sun, and there's no ionosphere.

There's also a lot of potential new physics that we can study in this last unexplored cosmological epoch in the universe. We will investigate the nature of dark matter and early dark energy and test our fundamental models of physics and cosmology in an unexplored age.

That process is going to start in 2026 with the LuSEE-Night mission, which is both a fundamental physics experiment and a cosmology experiment.

Courtesy, The Conversation

The Lunar Surface Electromagnetic Experiment at Night or LuSEE-Night, will fly in early 2026 to the far side of the Moon, which marks scientists' first attempt to do cosmology on Moon
PHOTO: FIREFLY AEROSPACE

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Tractor protests threaten to drive EU's policies into a ditch

Clockwise from top left: Italian farmers protesting against the EU policies; Farmers with tractors stand on a street in the centre of the Czech capital in Prague; Farmers drive their tractors during a protest in Madrid, Spain
PHOTO: EPA/PTI

It was the puddles of green sludge left by the tires of massive tractors in western Belgium's industrial farmlands that drew the attention of biological engineer Ineke Maes.

The slime was destructive algae, the result of the excess of chemicals used by farmers to boost their crops, but at a high cost to nature. Maes had hoped the European Union's environmental policies would start to make a fundamental difference by improving exhausted soils.

In recent weeks, some of those tractors moved off the land and onto the roads, blocking major cities and economic lifelines from Warsaw to Madrid and from Athens to Brussels. Farmers were demanding the reversal of some of the most progressive measures in the world to counter climate change and protect biodiversity, arguing that the rules were harming their livelihoods and strangling them with red tape..

The farmers' protests affected the daily lives of people across the 27-nation bloc, costing businesses tens of millions of euros in transportation delays. The disruption triggered knee jerk reactions from politicians at national and EU level: they committed to rolling back policies, some of them years in the making, on everything from the use of pesticides to limiting the amount of manure that could be spread on fields.

"In the environmental movement, we joke that we should get tractors ourselves to make a point. Then we would be competing fair and square. The purpose should be that we get negotiations, and that we get a deal through democratic process — the rules, you know," she said. Reasoned arguments, she says, have been drowned out by the rumble of tractor engines.

And there's no end in sight.

After hundreds of tractors disrupted the EU summit in Brussels early this month at a volume that kept some leaders awake at night, farmers plan to return on Monday. They intend to be there when agriculture ministers discuss an emergency item on the agenda — the simplification of agricultural rules and a decrease in checks at farms that environmentalists fear could amount to a further weakening of standards.

The political noise level from the tractors — not to mention the loads of manure dumped outside official buildings — does get through, officials said. "That puts a bit more pressure on the ministers inside. So I would believe that ministers will be a bit more — insisting to have concrete results," said a high-level EU official, who asked not to be identified because the meeting has yet to take place.

It is this attitude that drives the environmental lobby and NGOs to distraction: knowing that scientific arguments are too often no match for the rule of the street. As a result, the EU's flagship Green Deal, that aims to make the continent carbon-neutral by 2050, is under threat.

Yet ahead of Monday's farm protest and meeting of agriculture ministers, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, for many the most powerful EU politician, insisted that she "remains fully committed to delivering solutions to ease the pressure currently felt by our hard-working farming women and men."

Leyen's change in emphasis comes ahead of the 6-9 June elections, when a good showing by her Christian Democrat group, the European People's Party, will be key to keeping her at the helm of the all-powerful Commission. "It is a bit difficult putting a pin on von der Leyen," said Jutta Paulus, a Green member of the European Parliament. "She started off in 2019 being a climate and environment champion, more or less saying, 'We don't need the Greens anymore, we are green ourselves.' And now she says: 'Well industry called me and they are worried. So I have to do something.'"

In the wake of the tractor protests, action came fast and furious.

Early this month, von der Leyen's Commission shelved an important anti-pesticide proposal, insisting "a different approach is needed." She also allowed farmers to continue using some land they had been required to keep fallow to promote biodiversity. And the proposals on the table for Monday's meeting about simplifying paperwork go in the same direction.

At the same time, a nature restoration law which was seen as another element in the Green Deal aspiration has already been watered down to appease farmers before it goes to a final legislative vote next Tuesday.

And at a national level, politicians have been bending the same way, from France to Spain and Belgium.

Flanders, in northern Belgium, has already relaxed its policy on the use of manure which was intended to limit emissions of nitrates that can harm water quality. Under pressure from multinational food manufacturers, whose processing plants dwarf even the biggest family farms in western Belgium, farmers are likely to stick with the industrial methods that exhaust soils and pollute waterways, Maes fears.

"It is mind-boggling that this whole process is now grinding to a halt," she said.

—AP

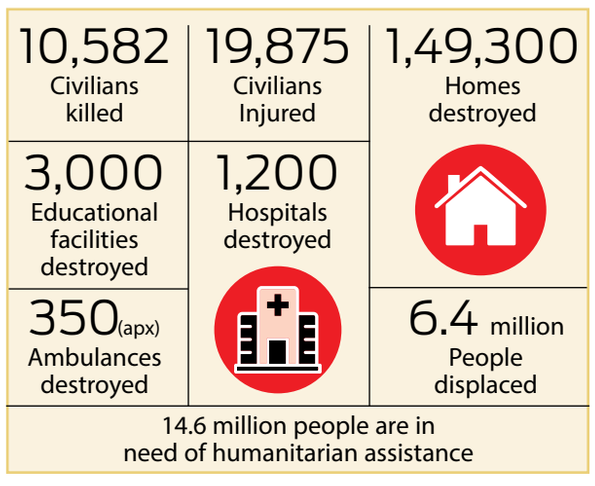
War in Ukraine at 2 years: Destruction seen from space - via radar

LOS ANGELES, 25 FEB

As soldiers and citizens provide information from the front lines and affected areas of the war in Ukraine – two years old as of 24 February, 2024 – in quasi-real time, an active open-source intelligence community has formed to keep track of troop activity, destruction and other aspects of the war.

Remote sensing complements this approach, offering a safe means to study inaccessible or dangerous areas. For example, seismologists have documented the high pace of bombardments and firing of artillery around Kyiv during the first few months of the war. Previously, Teng Wang, a professor at the Peking University in China, and I – both Earth scientists – studied illegal nuclear tests in North Korea with satellite data.

- To counter these issues, we used radars on-board satellites. Space-borne radar systems beam long-wavelength electromagnetic waves toward the Earth and then record the returning echos



View from above

Sensors on satellites record electromagnetic waves radiated or reflected from Earth's surface with wavelengths ranging from hundreds of nanometres to tens of centimetres, enabling semi-continuous monitoring on a global scale, unimpeded by political boundaries and natural obstacles.

Optical images, the equivalent of photographs taken from space, help governments, researchers and journalists monitor troop movements on the front and the destruction of equipment and facilities. Although optical images are easily interpreted, they suffer from cloud cover and operate only during daylight. To counter these issues, we used radars on-board satellites. Space-borne radar systems beam long-wavelength electromagnetic waves toward the Earth and then record the returning echos.

Radar from space

Free and publicly available radar data for civilian applications is rare – the United States is scheduled to launch its first one in March 2024 – but the European Space Agency has made such data available since the early 1990s. Data from the European Space Agency's Sentinel-1 satellite radar is freely accessible via their data hub.

Measure of destruction

We flagged highly damaged areas by comparing radar coherence before and after the war, within the areas classified as artificial surfaces by the European Space Agency's WorldCover 2021 dataset. Using this approach, we first analysed the battle of Bakhmut, one of the longest and bloodiest of the war, which began on 8 October, 2022, and ended with a Russian victory on 20 May, 2023. *—PTI*

14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and 6.4 million people displaced from Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

Pak plane crash in May 2020 blamed on 'human error'

KARACHI, 25 FEB

A Pakistan International Airlines plane crash that killed 101 people near the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi in May 2020 was a result of "human error" by the two pilots, according to the investigation report on the incident. The Aircraft Investigation Board (AIB) finally released its report on the reasons for the Airbus 320 failing to land safely at the Karachi airport and instead crashing into a residential neighbourhood near the airport. The board has held the failure of proper judgement while landing by the two pilots as the main reason for the fatal crash in which 101 people, including 99 passengers, lost their lives while two passengers miraculously survived. Several houses in the neighbourhood and parked vehicles were destroyed and damaged in the disaster. The report said the air traffic controller had four times warned the pilots that they shouldn't land as their altitude was not right. *—PTI*

Idaho to execute serial killer on death row

BOISE, 25 FEB

For nearly 50 years, Idaho's prison staffers have been serving Thomas Eugene Creech three meals a day, checking on him during rounds and taking him to medical appointments. This Wednesday, some of Idaho's prison staffers will be asked to kill him. Barring any last-minute stay, the 73-year-old, one of the nation's longest-serving death row inmates, will be executed by lethal injection for killing a fellow prisoner with a battery-filled sock in 1981. Creech's killing of David Jensen, a young, disabled man who was serving time for car theft, was his last in a broad path of destruction that saw Creech convicted of five murders in three states. He is also suspected of at least a half-dozen others. But now, decades later, Creech is mostly known inside the walls of the Idaho Maximum Security Institution as just "Tom," a generally well-behaved old-timer with a penchant for poetry. *—AP*

After 1,250 years, women join Japan's naked fest

TOKYO, 25 FEB

The sea of chanting, nearly-naked men tussle, push and shove towards the shrine. "Washoi! Washoi!" they yell - let's go, let's go. It is scene that has barely changed in the 1,250 years the Hadaka Matsuri, or the Naked Festival, has been taking place at the Konomiya Shrine, in central Japan. But this year there is a change - a big one. Away from the men's huddle, a group are about to become the first women to ever take part. The women gathered here know they are making history. Finding room in traditionally male-dominated spaces is difficult anywhere, but in Japan - which last year ranked 125 out of 146 on the World Economic Forum's gender gap index - it is particularly hard. Not that they weren't always there. "In the background, women have always worked very hard to support the men in the festival," explains Atsuko Tamakoshi, whose family has been working at the Konomiya festival for generations. ***—BBC News***

TRUMP DEFEATS NIKKI HALEY IN SOUTH CAROLINA PRIMARY

Haley received 39.4% of the votes against Trump's 59.9%

WASHIGNTON, 25 FEB

Donald Trump is one step closer to the Republican presidential nomination after a massive win over Nikki Haley in South Carolina.

The former president won his primary Opponent's home state by a 20-point margin, his fourth consecutive victory. As he celebrated Trump made no mention of Haley, who vowed to stay in the race. Instead he set his sights on the general election in November. That will be a likely rematch with his successor in the White House. "We're going to look Joe Biden right in the eye," he told supporters minutes after US media projected him as the winner on Saturday night. "He's destroying our country - and we're going to say 'get out Joe, you're fired'." With nearly 90 per cent of the votes counted, Haley received 39.4 per cent of the votes against Trump's 59.9 per cent, a gap of 20 per cent. A candidate needs 1,215 delegates to bag the party's nomination. So far, Haley has won 17 delegates and Trump has won 92.

The former US president Donald Trump won his primary Opponent's home state by a 20-point margin, his fourth consecutive victory. As he celebrated Trump made no mention of Haley, who vowed to stay in the race **PHOTO: PTI**

Trump lauded his party's "unity" after Saturday's result, saying: "There's never been a spirit like this. I have never seen the Republican Party so unified." It marked a shift from his response to last month's primary in New Hampshire, where he raged against Ms Haley for "doing a speech like she won". Haley, who once served as a popular two-term governor of South Carolina, congratulated her Opponent on his victory in her speech. She promised not to quit, however, saying the roughly 40% of the vote she received was "not some tiny group".

> **I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden**
>
> -Nikki Haley, Former governor of South Carolina

> **We're going to say 'get out Joe, you're fired'. He's destroying our country**
>
> -Donald Trump, former US president

"There are huge numbers of voters in our Republican primaries who are saying they want an alternative," she said, emphasising that her continued campaign was not about her own political ambitions. "I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden," she added.

She has re-committed to staying in the race until at least Super Tuesday - 5 March - when voters in 16 states will cast their ballots on the same day. Trump, who by now has won all four Republican primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, exuded confidence that he would defeat incumbent President Biden in November. *—BBC/AP*

POLITICAL TURMOIL

Pak gears up to hold Prez's poll by 9 March

ISLAMABAD, 25 FEB

Still struggling to address the rigging allegations after general elections in the country, Pakistan is now gearing up to elect the new president by 9 March.

Election Commission of Pakistan is set to hold an election for the office of the country's President by 9 March, two days before the retirement of half of the senators after completing their six-year term, Dawn reported quoting sources.

"The President will be elected by the present senators after setting up of all the four provincial Assemblies," a senior Pakistan Peoples Party office-bearer said, adding that the election could take place on 9 or 10 March.

The six-party alliance, set to form a coalition government at the Centre under the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Shehbaz Sharif, has already announced Asif Ali Zardari as its consensus candidate for the country's top constitutional office. Zardari previously served as the president from September 2008 to 2013 after the resignation of the military ruler Pervez Musharraf. Article 41(4) of the Constitution says that "election to the office of president shall be held not earlier than sixty days and not later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of the president in office: Provided that, if the election cannot be held within the period aforesaid because the National Assembly is dissolved, it shall be held within thirty days of the general election to the Assembly".

Since the general elections were held on 8 February, the presidential election is required to be conducted by 9 March, just two days before the retirement of half of the 100-member Senate.

At present, the house has 97 members due to the death of PML-N's Rana Maqbool Ahmed and the resignations of PTI's Shaukat Tarin and Anwaarul Haq Kakar of the Balochistan Awami Party after assuming the office of the caretaker prime minister. *—PTI*

Dr Arif Alvi **PHOTO: PTI**

Election of CM of Punjab to take place today

LAHORE, 25 FEB

As Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, is going to get elected as the first woman chief minister of Pakistan's Punjab province on Monday, the PMLN has clinched both speaker and deputy speaker offices in Punjab Assembly. Since the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PMLN) and its allies have a simple majority in the House there is no problem with her grabbing the top slot. The election for the Chief Minister office will be held between PMLN and PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) nominee. *—PTI*

US, UK carry out new strikes on Yemen's Houthis

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

The Pentagon says US and UK fighter planes have carried out strikes on 18 Houthi sites in Yemen - the fourth such joint operation by the allies.

The US says Saturday's strikes were directed against storage facilities, drones, air defence systems, radars and a helicopter of the militant movement. The UK says the allies acted to "further degrade" Houthi capabilities. There have been sustained attacks by the Iran-backed Houthis on shipping in the important Red Sea trade route.

The Houthis - who control large swathes of Yemen including the capital Sanaa - have been targeting vessels they say are linked to Israel and the West in response to the continuing Israel-Gaza war.

Global supply chains are now facing severe disruption and rising costs as a result of some of the biggest shipping companies diverting journeys away from the Red Sea - one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

In a joint statement, the Pentagon said that Saturday's "necessary and proportionate strikes specifically targeted 18 Houthi targets across eight locations in Yemen associated with Houthi underground weapons storage facilities, missile storage facilities, one-way attack unmanned aerial systems, air defence systems, radars, and a helicopter.

The statement said "the Houthis' now more than 45 attacks on commercial and naval vessels since mid-November constitute a threat to the global economy, as well as regional security and stability, and demand an international response".

The strikes were carried out "with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand", the statement added.

Shortly afterwards, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin stressed that America "will not hesitate to take action, as needed, to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways". *—BBC News*

NO PLACE TO GO

Infant Palestinian boy dies of hunger in Northern Gaza

GAZA, 25 FEB

A two-month-old Palestinian boy has died from starvation in northern Gaza, according to media reports, days after the United Nations warned of an "explosion" in child deaths due to Israel's war on the besieged enclave.

The Shehab news agency said Mahmoud Fattouh died at al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Friday. Footage, verified by Al Jazeera, shows the emaciated infant gasping for breath in a hospital bed. One of the paramedics who rushed the boy to the hospital says Mahmoud died from acute malnutrition.

The boy died at al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City **PHOTO: ANADOLU**

"We saw a woman carrying her baby, screaming for help. Her pale baby seemed to be taking his last breath," the paramedic says in the video. "We rushed him to hospital and he was found to be suffering acute malnutrition." *—Al Jazeera*

> **What the Israeli government is doing is not war, it is genocide. Children and women are being murdered**
>
> -Luiz Inacio, Brazil President

Alexei Navalny's body handed over to his mother

MOSCOW, 25 FEB

The body of Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother more than a week after he died, CNN reported, citing Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh's statement.

In a post shared on social media, Yarmysh stated, "Alexey's body was handed over to his mother. Many thanks to all those who demanded this with us." She stated that Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, is still in Salekhard, the Arctic town where her son's body was being held. On 16 February, Alexei died while he was behind bars in a nearby penal colony. According to the Russian Press Service, Navalny "felt unwell after a walk" and "almost immediately" lost consciousness, CNN reported. Yarmysh stated that plans regarding the funeral of Navalny have not been made yet. She added, "We do not know if the authorities will interfere to carry it out as the family wants and as Alexey deserves. We will inform you as soon as there is news."

Navalny's family and colleagues have blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for his death. The death of Alexei comes ahead of presidential election set to be held in Russia in March. Alexei's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, accused Putin of ordering that the body be held to hide cause of Navalny's death and out of fear that large crowds will attend his funeral. The allegations have been denied by Kremlin, according to CNN report. *—ANI*

Alexei Navalny **PHOTO: PTI**

Oppenheimer dominates SAG awards ahead of Oscars

Christopher Nolan's film won best film cast, while Cillian Murphy and Robert Downey Jr won individual acting prizes

FILM

- **Outstanding Cast:** Oppenheimer
- **Leading actor:** Cillian Murphy (Oppenheimer)
- **Supporting actor:** Robert Downey Jr (Oppenheimer)
- **Supporting actress:** Da'Vine Joy Randolph (The Holdovers)
- **Stunt ensemble in a movie:** Mission Impossible-Dead Reckoning Part One

TELEVISION

- **Ensemble in a Comedy Series:** The Bear
- **Leading actress in Drama:** Elizabeth Debicki (The Crown)
- **Comedy series actress:** Ayo Edebiri (The Bear)

Oppenheimer team posses for a group photograph after the event with Robert Downey Jr, Emily Blunt and Cillian Murphy **PHOTO: X/SAG**

Leading actor in Drama: Pedro Pascal (The Last of Us)

Leading actress: Lily Gladstone (Killers of the Flower Moon)

India's steel exports scale 18-month high

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

India's monthly steel exports hit an 18-month high to 1.1 million tonnes in January 2024 on increased demand from the European Union and supportive global prices, SteelMint said. Besides, competitive domestic prices of steel contributed to a rise in exports, the research firm said in its latest report.The outbound shipment of steel in January 2023 was 0.67 million tonne, as per SteelMint data.On reasons behind the surge in exports, SteelMint said, "Good restocking demand from the European Union (EU) contributed 67 percent of the 1.11 MT (export) in January. It was highest in last 18 months." While the price of hot rolled coil (HRC) in India's trade segment was at Rs 54,300/a tonne, the global rate was USD 710 per tonne (about Rs 58,000). This factor also contributed to the demand for Indian steel in the global markets. *—PTI*

431 infra projects hit by cost overrun of Rs 4.80 T in Jan

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

As many as 431 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or above, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.80 trillion in January 2024, an official report stated.According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Mospi), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,821 projects, 431 reported cost overrun and 780 projects were delayed." Total original cost of implementation of the 1,821 projects was Rs 26,09,679.38 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 30,90,135.99 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,80,456.61 crore (18.41 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for January 2024 said.According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till January 2024 is Rs 16,43,821.69 crore, which is 53.20 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects *—PTI*

Imports of paper, paperboards rise 37% in Apr-Dec

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Imports of paper and paperboards have increased by 37 per cent to around 1.47 million tonnes in April-December this fiscal, which have hit the local paper mills, an industry body said on Sunday. Paper and paperboard imports were around 1.07 million tonnes in the corresponding period of the last fiscal year, the Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA) said while citing DGCI&S data. The import of the commodity had seen a 25 per cent jump to 1.44 million tonnes in FY23 in volume terms and April-December figures have crossed that also. Imports of paper and paperboard in huge volumes and worth Rs 10,000 crore in nine months are impacting the Make-in-India drive as well as depriving employment to 5 lakh committed farmers who are aligned with the domestic Paper Industry through agro, farm forestry, IPMA President Pawan Agarwal said. According to government data, out of over 900 paper mills, only 553 are operational in India.*—PTI*

Mahindra to invest ₹4.5cr to double room capacity

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Ltd (MHRIL) plans to invest up to Rs 4,500 crore in the next three to four years to double its room capacity to 10,000, according to company Managing Director and CEO, Kavinder Singh.It is actively pursuing partnerships with state governments besides setting up new resorts, brownfield expansion and acquisitions to achieve the target to increase room count from 5,000 to 10,000 by FY30.About Rs 835 crore of investment is underway for five greenfield, brownfield, and acquisition projects. *—PTI*

Household consumption doubled in last 10 years

The survey was conducted from August 2022 to July 2023

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The per capita monthly household expenditure more than doubled in 2022-23 as compared to 2011-12, according to the latest study of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

NSSO, under Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, conducted Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) during August 2022 to July 2023, an official statement said on Saturday.

The survey aims at generating estimates of household Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) and its distribution separately for the rural and urban sectors of the country, for states and Union Territories, and for different socio-economic groups.As per the survey, the average MPCE at current prices (without imputation) more than doubled to Rs 6,459 in urban areas in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12. Similarly in rural areas, it jumped to Rs 3,773 from Rs 1,430 at current prices.

As per the study, the average MPCE at 2011-12 prices (without imputation) also increased to Rs 3,510 in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12 in urban areas.

Similarly, it rose to Rs 2,008 from Rs 1,430 in rural areas at 2011-12 prices.

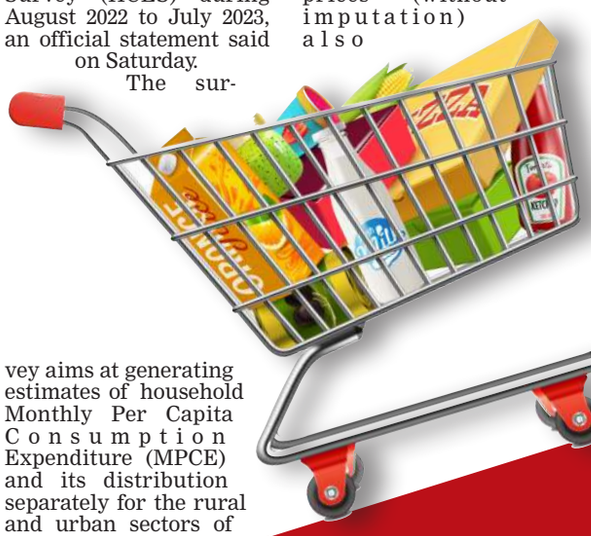
It showed that the average MPCE also increased (with imputation) to Rs 6,521 in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12 at current prices in urban areas.

Similarly, it rose to Rs 3,860 from Rs 1,430 in rural areas.The average MPCE at 2011-12 prices (with imputation) increased to Rs 3,544 in 2022-23 from Rs 2,630 in 2011-12 in urban areas.It increased to Rs 2,054 from Rs 1,430 in rural areas.

The estimates of MPCE are based on the data collected from 2,61,746 households (1,55,014 in rural areas and 1,06,732 in urban areas) in the central sample spread over all states and Union Territories.

In HCES:2022-23, the usual practice of imputation of the value figures for consumption out of home-grown/home-produced stock and gifts, loans, free collection and goods received in exchange of goods and services etc. has been continued; and accordingly, estimates of MPCE have been generated.

Besides, a provision for collection of information on the quantity of consumption for a number of items, received and consumed by the households free of cost through various social welfare programmes has been made in HCES:2022-23.Value figures for food items: rice, wheat/atta, jowar, bajra, maize, ragi, barley, small millets, pulses, gram, salt, sugar, edible oil and non-food items: laptop/PC, tablet, mobile handset, bicycle, motorcycle/Scooty, clothing (school uniform), footwear (school shoe etc.) received free of cost by the households through these programmes, have been imputed using an appropriate method. *—PTI*



GST Council may soon clarify tax exemption to RERA

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

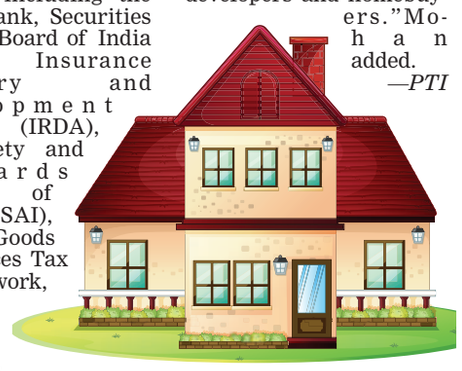
GST Council is likely to soon clarify that Real Estate Regulatory Authority (Rera) will not be required to pay Goods and Services Tax (GST), an official said.

According to the official, Rera, which functions as a regulator as well as facilitator for the realty sector, is covered under Article 243G of the Constitution dealing with powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats.Rera was set up in different states to ensure transparency in real estate projects, protect the interest of consumers and to establish an adjudicating mechanism for speedy dispute redressal.

The official said that after discussions with Rera functionaries it was decided that GST is not applicable on them.A meeting of GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister and comprising state ministers, is likely to be held before the imposition of Model Code of Conduct for the general election due in April-May.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said before 18 July, 2022, certain services offered by key regulatory bodies in India, including the Reserve Bank, Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) network, were not subject to GST.

This exemption was lifted on 18 July, 2022, leading to discussions about the tax implications for Rera bodies as well."Furthermore, in the residential real estate sector, Input Tax Credit (ITC) is not permissible, which means excluding Rera authorities from GST considerations could potentially reduce expenses for both developers and homebuyers."Mohan added. *—PTI*



DLF to launch properties worth ₹80K cr in 4 years

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Realty major DLF plans to launch properties worth nearly Rs 80,000 crore over the next 3-4 years to tap rising demand for housing and commercial projects. DLF, the country's largest real estate firm in terms of market cap, sold properties worth Rs 15,000 crore during 2022-23 and is set to surpass this number in the current fiscal going by sale bookings clocked in the first three quarters.

According to an investors' presentation, DLF is aiming to launch 10 million square feet of area in the next financial year having revenue potential of Rs 32,000 crore. It has also identified another 22 million square feet area with an estimated revenue of Rs 46,850 crore for the 2024-25 fiscal and beyond.

Most of the projects to be launched for sale over the next 3-4 years would be residential and that too in luxury and ultra-luxury segments. Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Goa, and Chennai would be the focus area of the company.

DLF Group Chief Financial Officer Vivek Anand told analysts that the sustained demand momentum across all segments continues to be encouraging. "Consequently, we have identified a fresh pipeline of new products of approximately 32 million square feet with a sales potential of approximately Rs 79,000 crore, which is more than double of what we have delivered during the last 3 to 4 years and is in line with our plans of scaling up the business," he said.

"The key launch that we are working on for the next 12 to 15 months are products in Gurugram, Chennai, Goa, and the first phase of our Mumbai project," he said. *—PTI*

DLF is aiming to launch 10 million square feet of area in the next year having revenue potential of Rs 32,000 crore *PHOTO: PTI*

NUMBER OF M&A DEALS IN INDIA FALLS 10% TO 793 IN 2023: PWC

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The number of merger and acquisition (M&A) deals during 2023 dropped by 10 per cent on an annual basis to 793, said a PwC India report on Sunday.

However, the total disclosed deal value for M&A declined much steeper at 38 per cent during the year, according to the report titled 'Deals at a glance'. The report further observed that PE (Private Equity) investments totalled USD 36 billion, marking a substantial 36 per cent drop from 2022.Despite this decline, the average investment size per deal increased to USD 46 million from USD 42 million in 2022, reflecting a potential shift towards larger opportunities.

While early-stage investments were 53 per cent less compared to that in 2022, the report said, these along with growth-stage investments continued to make up the major share, constituting around 73 per cent of fundings in 2023. *—PTI*

LIC FINANCE HOPES TO EARN ₹5CR PROFIT

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

LIC Housing Finance, the mortgage arm of insurance behemoth LIC, is expecting a net profit of Rs 5,000 crore in the current financial year on the back of robust loan demand and expansion in non-core business.

The non-core business includes Loan Against Property (LAP) and affordable housing finance, LIC Housing Finance managing director and CEO Tribhuwan Adhikari told PTI in an interaction.

During 2022-23, the biggest housing finance company earned a net profit of Rs 2,891 crore.

"Affordable housing segment remained strong in tier-2 and tier-3 markets. We remained focused on this segment, as it gives an opportunity to millions of aspiring Indians to own their home with a moderate budget," he said.

In addition to business growth, he said, "our endeavour has been to improve service standards through ongoing digital transformation of our processes." Fourth quarter is usually the most important business period for the company and going by the current trends, he said, "we expect to close this financial year with healthy numbers." He said the company has earned a net profit of Rs 3,675 crore in the three quarters and hopes to touch Rs 5,000 crore by the end of this financial year.

However, he presented a slightly conservative outlook of 2.6-2.8 per cent NIM during the fiscal ending March 2024 due to high cost of funds.Cost of funds are elevated due to high interest rate. *—PTI*

- **The company has earned a net profit of Rs 3,675 crore in the three quarters and hopes to touch Rs 5,000 crore by the end of this financial year**

WTO MEET

India stresses permanent solution on food security

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

India will strongly oppose a China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact besides pressing for finding a permanent solution to public stock holding of grains for food security and protection of the interests of fishermen at the WTO ministerial meeting beginning Tuesday. The Indian delegation is led by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

The four-day 13th ministerial conference (MC13) will start today in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Trade ministers of 164 member countries of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are meeting against the backdrop of the uncertain global economic situation due to the Red Sea crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The key issue of India's interests at the meeting relates to finding a permanent solution for its minimum support price (MSP) issue for food security, agricultural reforms, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce moratorium on import duties, dispute settlement, and WTO reforms.

- **India would maintain its stand that issues like labour, and environment are non-trade issues and they should not be discussed at the WTO**

The public stock-holding (PSH) programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at MSP, and stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor.

India stresses the need for PSH for its large, vulnerable population and wants a permanent solution from the MC13. Food procurement, stockholding, and distribution are crucial to India's food security strategy.India's stance is to protect farmer livelihoods and ensure equitable market access. However, developed nations are pushing to reduce domestic support and increase market openness irrespective of the fact that they themselves provide large subsidies to their rich farmers.India also seeks a revamp of the Appellate Body to ensure fairness, facing off against the USA's reluctance to do so and EU's proposal for alternate mechanisms.

New Issues

India would maintain its stand that issues like labour, and environment are non-trade issues and they should not be discussed at the WTO.

Developed countries are also pushing to include women economic empowerment issues in the WTO talks. *—PTI*

FPIs infuse ₹18.5cr in debt market in Feb

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 18,500 crore so far this month, driven by the upcoming inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This came following a net investment of over Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore.

"With introduction of India in global bond indices this year, Indian debt inflows should get steady flows going ahead. Also, further front-loading before actual inclusion in June this year is also expected. This is also in line with long-term aim to deepen our underdeveloped debt-markets," Kislay Upadhyay, smallcase Manager & Founder Fidelfolio, said.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out Rs 424 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 18,589 crore in the debt markets this month (till 23 February). With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 38,426 crore in 2024. They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months. FPIs infused Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October. *—PTI*

FAILING TO MEET NORM

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Stock exchanges fine IOC, GAIL, ONGC

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

State-owned oil and gas giants including IndianOil, ONGC and GAIL (India) have been slapped fines for the third straight quarter for failing to meet listing norm requirements of having the requisite number of directors on their board.

Stock exchanges have fined oil refining and fuel marketing giant Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), gas utility GAIL, and refiners Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) a cumulative Rs 32.5 lakh, stock exchange filings showed.

The companies detailed the fines imposed by the BSE and NSE for either not having the requisite number of independent directors or the mandated women director in the third quarter ended 31 December, 2023, but were quick to point out that appointment of directors was done by the government. The companies had faced fines for the same reason in the previous two quarters as well.

The six PSUs in separate filings said they have been slapped with a fine of Rs 5,42,800 each for the third quarter. While ONGC and its subsidiaries HPCL and MRPL, GAIL and OIL faced fines for not having the required number of independent directors on their board, IOC for not having a woman independent director on its board. *—PTI*

MCAP OF 8 OF FIRMS SOARS TO ₹1.10 LAKH CRORE

PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Market valuation of eight of the 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 1,10,106.83 crore last week, with Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) emerging as the biggest gainer. Last week, the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark rose 716.16 points or 0.97 percent.

RIL, ICICI Bank, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC, and Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) were among the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys saw a combined erosion of Rs 38,477.49 crore in market valuation. Reliance Industries added Rs 43,976.96 crore to its market valuation at Rs 20,20,470.88 crore. On Friday, shares of the oil-to-telecom conglomerate hit a fresh 52-week high of Rs 2,996.15 apiece.

The valuation of ICICI Bank jumped Rs 27,012.47 crore to Rs 7,44,808.72 crore, and that of state-owned insurer LIC surged Rs 17,235.62 crore to Rs 6,74,655.88 crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of ITC rallied Rs 8,548.19 crore to Rs 5,13,640.37 crore, and that of Hindustan Unilever Ltd zoomed Rs 4,534.71 crore to Rs 5,62,574.38 crore.

Public sector lender State Bank of India mcap climbed Rs 4,149.94 crore to Rs 6,77,735.03 crore. SBI surpassed IT company Infosys to become the country's fifth most-valued firm by market valuation on the BSE on Wednesday. However, the valuation of IT major Tata Consultancy Services declined by Rs 27,949.73 crore to Rs 14,66,030.97 crore, and that of Infosys slumped by Rs 10,527.76 crore to Rs 6,96,045.32 crore. Reliance Industries continued to retain the title of the most valued firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, SBI, LIC, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever, and ITC. *—PTI*

₹2,000 NOTE BAN

Currency-in-circulation growth dips to 3.7% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The growth in currency in circulation decelerated to 3.7per cent for the week ended February 9 from 8.2per cent a year ago, reflecting the impact of the decision of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to withdraw Rs 2,000 banknotes.

Currency-in-circulation (CiC) refers to notes and coins in circulation, while currency with the public comprises notes and coins in circulation minus cash with banks.According to the RBI, commercial banks have reported double-digit growth in deposits in January, which too can be attributed to withdrawal of Rs Rs 2,000 currency notes. The growth of Reserve Money (RM), as per the RBI data, decelerated to 5.8per cent as on 9 February, 2024 from 11.2per cent a year ago (8.8per cent adjusted for the first-round impact of change in Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR).Components of RM include CiC, banks' deposits in RBI and other deposits with the central bank.

PHOTO: PTI

The growth in CiC , the largest component of RM, decelerated to 3.7per cent from 8.2per cent a year ago, reflecting the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 banknotes, according to the RBI.As on 31 January, nearly 97.5per cent of Rs 2,000 banknotes were returned to the banking system, and only about Rs 8,897 crore worth of such notes are still withpublic.

The total value of Rs 2,000 banknotes in circulation was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on 19 May, 2023, when the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 banknotes was announced.Public and entities holding such notes were initially asked to either exchange or deposit them in bank accounts by 30 September, 2023. Deadline was later extended to 7 October, 2023. Deposit and exchange services at bank branches were discontinued on 7 October, 2023. *—PTI*

Rohit, Jaiswal provide a fiery start in run-chase

Ashwin, Jurel, Kuldeep shine as India rise above England

RANCHI, 25 FEB

Dhruv Jurel's defensive chef-d'oeuvre found a perfect match in the destructive symphony of spin by fifer-man Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav as India seized decisive control of the fourth Test against England at the end of a dramatic third day here on Sunday.

India walked off at the stumps, having chiseled off 40 runs from the 192-run target without losing a wicket.Rohit Sharma (24 batting) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (16 batting) would be confident of the team mustering the remaining 152 runs without much theatre.

However, it was Jurel who started India's resistive movement with a defiant 90 that came in 149 balls and 211 minutes. It carried the hosts to 307 in their first innings from the overnight 219 for seven.In their second essay, England just did not have any answers to the questions posed by Ashwin (5/51), his 35th five-wicket haul in Tests, and Kuldeep Yadav (4/22), getting bowled out for a meager 145.Opener Zak Crawley (60) was the lone post of the fight.

R Ashwin **PHOTO: PTI**

Kuldeep Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

It would have been worse for England without that Crawley fifty before his innings was halted by Kuldeep.

Ravindra Jadeja bagged a solitary wicket but it was the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow.Crawley was the only English batter to go past 30 as they lost their last seven wickets for just 35 runs with Ashwin and Jadeja weaving their magic.

Introduced late, the left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep struck in his third over when he cleaned up Crawley with a gem of a delivery that skidded through, unsettling the middle stump.

Crawley was looking in an ominous mood and tore into the Indian attack against the run of play to stretch their overall lead past 150 as Rohit persisted with Ashwin and Jadeja in the second session.

India 307 (Jurel 90, Jaiswal 73, Bashir 5-119) and 40 for 0 (Rohit 24*, Jaiswal 16*) need 152 runs to beat England 353 and 145 (Crawley 60, Ashwin 5-51, Kuldeep 4-22). —*PTI*

JACK LEACH TO UNDERGO KNEE SURGERY

LONDON, 25 FEB

Left-arm spinner Jack Leach is set to undergo a knee surgery on Tuesday after being ruled out of England's ongoing five-Test tour of India.Leach, who came into the India series as England's most experienced spinner, took part in only the opening Test at Hyderabad which his side won by 28 runs. The 32-year-old spinner suffered an injury on the field which caused severe swelling, forcing him to leave the tour after missing the second Test and subsequently returning home.—*PTI*

Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the heavily rain-affected third T20I **PHOTO: AFP**

Australia beat NZ by 27 runs via DLS; sweep series

AUCKLAND, 25 FEB

Australia beat New Zealand by 27 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis system in the heavily rain-affected third T20 international Sunday to complete a 3-0 sweep in the series and to harden its favoritism for the World Cup later this year.

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner won the toss in his 100th T20 international and sent Australia in, mindful that the rain might dictate terms later in the match. It did.

But New Zealand botched the run chase for the second time in three days at Eden Park, unable to conquer Australia's world-class attack.

Under the revised rules for the 10-over innings, Australia was allowed five bowlers who could bowl two overs each with a three-over power play.

The young left-armer Spencer Johnson took 1-10 from his two overs, showing why he made $1.4 million in the IPL auction earlier this year. Nathan Ellis conceded only 11 from his two overs, Mitchell Starc only 15, and Adam Zampa took 1-20.

"I think I feel most comfortable when I'm playing shots," Short said. "It was a bit of a strange game because of the rain and being off and on.

"The aggressive way is the way we want to play our T20."

Credit also goes to wicket-keeper Matthew Wade who took over the captaincy from Mitch Marsh and led Australia with great tactical insight in tricky conditions.

"Our bowlers were unbelievable today the way they came out and executed," Wade said. "It's as clinical a bowling performance as I've seen from an Australian unit and for Matt Short to come out and bat the way he did is exciting for the future.

"We've got depth in our squad and everyone's enjoying their cricket."

Australia should have been massively disadvantaged by the fact its innings were abruptly ended after only 10 overs when it had been playing for 20. But it already was in a powerful position.

New Zealand couldn't match the clinical aggression of the Australian batters. Glenn Phillips and Mark Chapman faced most of the last five overs and simply couldn't find a way to score consistent boundaries against the outstanding Australian attack.

Australia has demonstrated the ability to win in all circumstances in this series, including its thrilling final ball victory in the first match, before an emphatic 72-run win in the second game.

"They're a quality side," Santner said. "Their big three quicks and the power they possess, I guess they showed us (how to play) throughout the series.

"The first one was a close one and I guess we got outplayed the last two."

Australia 118 for 4 (Head 33, Short 27) beat New Zealand 98 for 3 (Phillips 40*, Johnson 1-10, Zampa 1-20) by 27 runs (by DLS method) —*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Abhay wins Goodfellow Classic squash in Toronto

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Asian Games medallist Abhay Singh clinched his eighth PSA title with a convincing 3-0 victory over Elliott Morris Devred of Wales in the final of the Goodfellow Classic, a USD 9000 Challenger squash event, in Toronto.

The top-seeded Indian claimed an 11-7, 11-9, 11-9 win against Devred in 40 minutes in what was his 12th career final.

It was the second Challenger title of the year for the world No. 66 Abhay after triumphing at the JSW Willingdon in Mumbai last month.

The 25-year-old trainee of the Indian Squash Academy, who won the team gold and mixed doubles bronze at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Thonakal wins elite men's race in New Delhi Marathon

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Former Asian champion Gopi Thonakal won the New Delhi Marathon title but missed out on the Paris Olympics qualifying time by a big margin here on Sunday.The 35-year-old Gopi, who had clinched the Asian marathon title in 2017, won the men's elite race covering the distance of 42.195km in 2 hours, 14 minutes, and 40 seconds, well outside the Paris Games qualifying time of 2:08:10.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Patty Tavatanakit wins LPGA Thailand by one stroke

CHONBURI, 25 FEB

Local favorite Patty Tavatanakit held off a fast-finishing Albane Valenzuela to clinch the LPGA Thailand by one stroke on Sunday.The 24-year-old Bangkok native showcased her prowess with a brilliant approach shot to tap in an easy birdie on the final hole to card a final round 67, finishing at 21 under-par-267 at Siam Country Club Pattaya Old Course."I'm honestly speechless. —*AP*

Sarabia's strike secures Wolves' 1-0 win over Sheffield United

LONDON, 25 FEB

Wolverhampton Wanderers climbed to eighth place in the Premier League with a 1-0 win over Sheffield United on Sunday, with Pablo Sarabia's first-half strike sealing their third win in four matches.

Wolverhampton Wanderers climbed to eighth place **PHOTO: AFP**

Wolves' first league win at home since December took them to 38 points from 26 matches. United, who have 13 points, remained bottom of the table. The hosts looked for an early lead when Mario Lamina headed Sarabia's free kick from the edge of the six-yard box in the 12th minute but Jayden Bogle protected the near post with a block. —*AP*

Thakur, Sarwate give Vidarbha command over K'taka

NAGPUR, 24 FEB

Yash Thakur and Aditya Sarwate shone brightly as Vidarbha moved into a commanding position against Karnataka after swelling their lead to 224 runs on the third day of the Ranji Trophy quarter-final match here on Sunday.

PHOTO: PTI

Left-arm spinner Sarwate (3/50) and pacer Thakur (3/48) shared six wickets equally among them as Karnataka were bundled out for 286 in their first innings after resuming from overnight 98 for two.

It helped the hosts take a huge innings lead of 174 runs and Vidarbha closed day three at 50 for no loss in their second innings with openers and first-innings centurion Atharva Taide (21) and Dhruv Shorey (29) manning the crease. Karnataka had an arduous task of closing the gap with Vidarbha.

But Pandey, a hundred-maker in the last match against Chandigarh, perished in the first session itself for 15, getting castled by Thakur. But vice-captain Nikin Jose (82, 212b, 11x4) and Hardik combined to milk 50 runs for the fourth wicket as Karnataka's innings seemed to have got back on track.

However, the Thakur-Karun Nair combine spelled doom for Hardik as Karnataka lost their fifth wicket for 198.

There was another useful stand of 53 between Jose and Srinivas, another centurion from Karnataka's last encounter, as it took them past 250. But Sarwate elicited an edge from Srinivas which nestled in the big gloves of Akshay Wadkar.

At 251 for six, Karnataka did not have any genuine chance to overtake Vidarbha's first-innings total of 460 and Jose's dismissal on the team score of 286 was the end of their slender hopes. —*PTI*

Pranavi earns first career top-5 finish, Diksha ends up in 9th

RABAT (MOROCCO), 25 FEB

Indian golfers Pranavi Urs and Diksha Dagar capped a fine week by registering creditable top-10 finishes at the Lalla Meryem Cup here on Sunday.Pranavi shot 6-under 67 for her first career top-five finish on the Ladies European Tour (LET) to get to 8-under 211, while Diksha carded a final round of 72 for 5-under to finish ninth.England's Bronte Law fired a phenomenal final round of 64 (-9) to come from behind and clinch a three-shot victory on a low-scoring final day.Pranavi, who had rounds of 71-73 on the first two days, was off to a flyer with four birdies and an eagle on the front nine for a stunning 6-under 31.She added a birdie on the 11th but gave away a shot on the Par-3 17th and finished with 67.Diksha birdied second, third, and 14th and dropped shots on 13th and 15th for 71.Winner Law got off to a hot start rolling in a birdie on the first before dropping a shot on the next. —*AP*

Mehuli, Anish and Ganga win in National Rifle & Pistol selection trials **PHOTO: IANS**

Mehuli, Anish and Ganga win in national selection trials

BHOPAL, 25 FEB

India's Paris Olympic quota holders enjoyed a favorable outing in the first finals of the national rifle-pistol selection trials 3 and 4, with West Bengal's Mehuli Ghosh and Haryana's Anish Bhanwala ending up winners here on Sunday.

Army marksman Ganga Singh bucked the trend in the day's final competition, winning the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event with plenty to spare.

Mehuli qualified for the top eights with a characteristically solid 631.5 in the first 60-shot round. Tamil Nadu's R. Narmada Nithin topped with 632.5.

In the final, Mehuli was joint third behind Punjab's Jasmeen Kaur and local favorite Ashi Chouksey after the first five-shot series and slipped to fourth in the middle before getting back to that position after the 16th single shot with Jasmeen and Ashi still 1-2.

Thereafter she shot 10.7 or above in five of her last eight shots, the 17th being a perfect 10.9, to pip Ashi by 0.1 and finish with 251.6. Jasmeen settled for third position with 229.9.

The men's 25m rapid-fire pistol event reinforced Bhanwala's stature as India's number one RFP shooter as he cantered home with a 32-hits in the six-man 40-shot final. Army marksman Gurmeet was some distance behind with 29 hits while Rajasthan's Bhavesh Shekhwat was third with 22.

Anish had earlier topped the qualification over two days with a total of 589 with Gurmeet again way behind on second with 583. —*PTI*

Yathiraj wins gold at the Para-Badminton World C'ships

PATTAYA, 25 FEB

India's Suhas Yathiraj, Pramod Bhagat and Krishna Nagar capped their impressive run by securing gold medals in men's singles SL4, SL3, and SH6 classes respectively at the Para-Badminton World Championship here on Sunday.The world No 3 Yathiraj, a Paralympic silver medallist, outwitted Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan 21-18 21-18 in the SL4 final (standing/lower limb impairment/minor) for her maiden world title. "Gold it is, happy and proud to be world champion," tweeted the 40-year-old Yathiraj, who hails from Karnataka and is an IAS officer of the 2007 batch of Uttar Pradesh cadre. —*PTI*

Harmanpreet Kaur seals five-wicket win with a six vs Gujarat Giants at Chinnaswamy Stadium, in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal batter Newcastle in sixth straight win

- Arsenal's free-scoring Premier League form continued as Newcastle were blown away 4-1 at the Emirates on Saturday to move back within two points of leaders Liverpool.

LONDON, 24 FEB

Arsenal's free-scoring Premier League form continued as Newcastle were blown away 4-1 at the Emirates on Saturday to move back within two points of leaders Liverpool.

The Gunners are aiming to win their first league title in 20 years and are keen to make amends for faltering down the final straight last season as Manchester City stormed clear on their way to winning the treble.

Mikel Arteta's men stumbled to a 1-0 Champions League defeat at Porto in midweek, but were quickly back on the horse domestically to take their tally to 25 goals in six consecutive Premier League wins. Arsenal's prowess from set-pieces forced an own goal from Sven Botman before Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, and Jakub Kiwior from another corner killed off Newcastle. Despite the amount of distance between them both geographically and at the table, this fixture has become somewhat of a rivalry in recent times. January 2023 saw a touchline dispute between the respective coaching staff, while November's meeting ended with Mikel Arteta the subject of an FA hearing after he labeled Anthony Gordon's winner a "disgrace".

In turn, the Emirates faithful were in full voice ahead of kick-off and the Arsenal players matched the energy of their fans early on.

The jeers for Newcastle's timewasting started early, with the Magpies taking plenty of time from each stoppage.Those jeers soon turned to cheers however, when Sven Botman was unlucky enough to deflect the ball just over his own goal-line and give the hosts a deserved lead.

Six minutes later and it was two, with Kai Havertz granted the freedom of the penalty area to double Arsenal's advantage.The German ace really should have put his side three goals up immediately after the break when he went through on one with Loris Karius only to slot his strike the wrong side of the upright.

Arsenal lost a bit of their rhythm after that, with the visitors enjoying their best period of the game during the first 15 minutes of the second half.

The Gunners are aiming to win their first league title in 20 years **PHOTO: AFP**

Arsenal soon put an end to that, with Bukayo Saka netting his 13th league goal of the campaign to quash the last of the Magpies hopes.

The England ace dealt a hammer blow to the visitors when he rifled a low-driven left-footed strike that saw Karius stand and watch it hit the back of his net.Four minutes separated Arsenal's third and fourth. Kiwior's header deflected off of Lewis Miley to seal all three points for the Gunners, though there was time for a familiar face to pull a goal back for Newcastle when Joe Willock headed home. —*AP*